

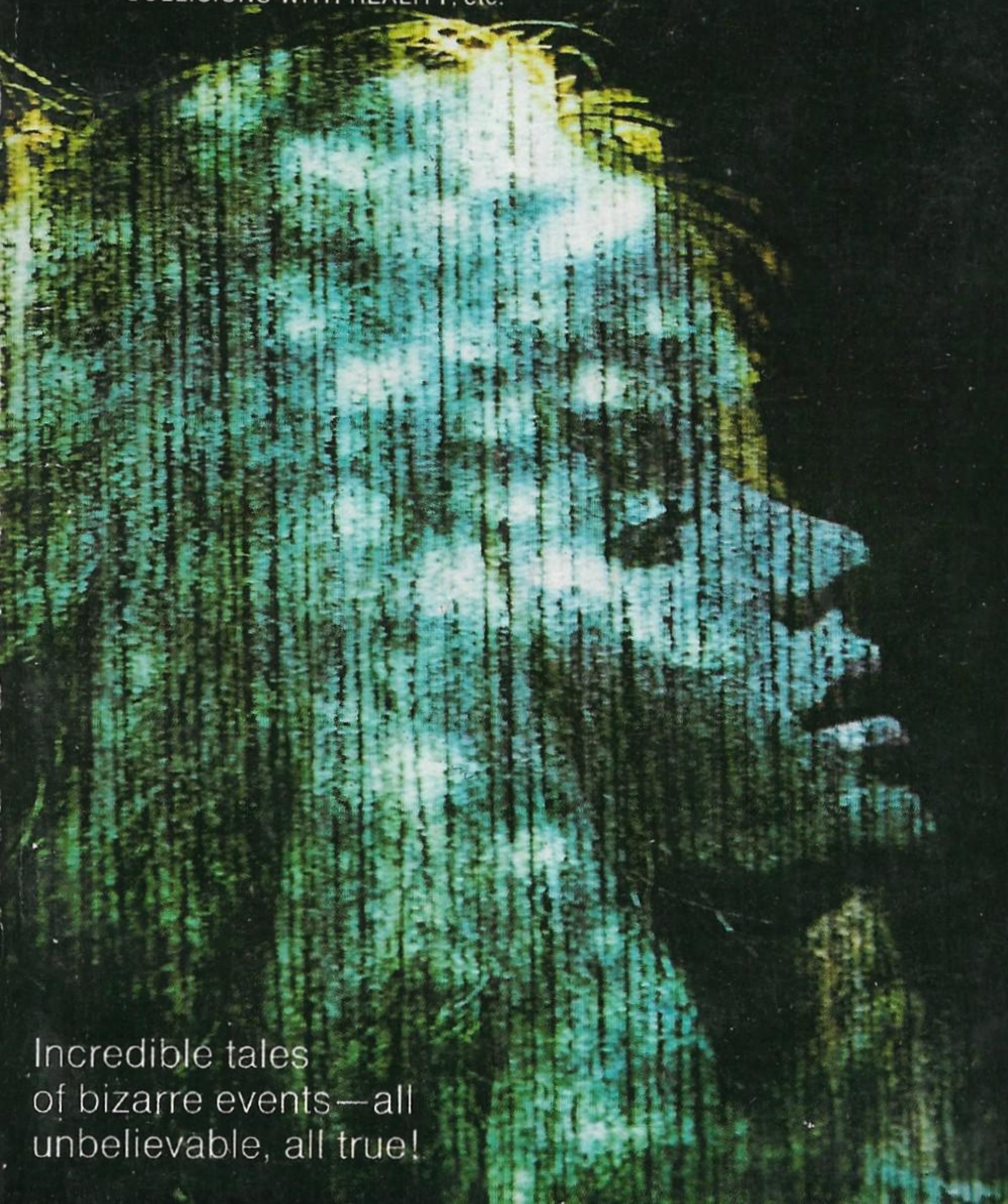
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Beyond All Reason

by **JOHN MACKLIN**

Author of PRELUDE TO NIGHTMARE, ORBITS OF THE UNKNOWN,
COLLISIONS WITH REALITY, etc.



Incredible tales
of bizarre events—all
unbelievable, all true!

Begley was standing at the foot of the stairs staring up at the first floor landing with an expression of sheer terror. His wife in her night robe was teetering at the top, waving and gesticulating as if she was struggling with someone. Yet, all that could be seen was a faint movement in the shadows—a woman or a manifestation. . . .

Before anybody could move, Lady Sarah toppled backwards down the stairs. Her last scream stopped abruptly as her neck snapped when she hit the bottom stair. Then with a moan like a terrified animal, her husband backed slowly away from the stairs—staring wide-eyed at something that only he could see, coming down the stairs towards him. . . .

—from *The Mysterious Madonna of Binstead Manor*

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A LOOK THROUGH SECRET DOORS
ORBITS OF THE UNKNOWN
PRELUDE TO NIGHTMARE
JOURNEY BEYOND THE GRAVE

*Available in Ace STAR Editions

Beyond All Reason

by JOHN MACKLIN

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A FATAL ACCIDENT

The night of August 3, 1959, was wet and windy. The sky was overcast and night came quickly. The lights on the steady stream of cars glowed, the beams of light fragmented in a thin sheen of rain. It was a night for comfort, for home and hearth and the few people about hurried as if to escape to the warmth of their nests.

Mike Bell and his wife had decided to stay in London and meet two old friends, Duncan and Jane Foster. Every three months the two men, who worked at the same office, arranged to meet their respective wives in town and the four then went to a show and had a late meal.

The dreary night had no effect on them. After meeting they moved to a small bar near Villiers Street, out of earshot of the traffic still rolling through Charing Cross.

From the window they could see the street and the news-vendor leaning against the wall at the corner. The rain fell more steadily and Mike remarked that he had bought a newspaper off that man for some five years and still didn't know his name. He paused as drinks were bought and the conversation turned to the evening ahead.

Suddenly, there was a sharp squeal of brakes, always a note of alarm. The four people turned from the bar and gazed silently through the window. As they watched the news-vendor seemed to hesitate in the road, perhaps made immobile by his burden of newspapers. The car, a black sedan, braked fiercely on the shining road. As the brakes locked the car slid forward remorselessly. The whole thing seemed to happen in slow motion—it was like a film, remote, inevitable, impossible to prevent. The car hit the old man.

Mike Bell drew his wife close and turned her away from the scene. Within seconds, it seemed, people appeared, drawn by disaster. Then an ambulance screeched to a halt and men ran to the silent body. From where he stood Mike

knew no medical ministrations would help the silent form; apart from the physical battering the body must have received, the still form seemed to personify death.

The four friends waited in silence. The ambulance left and the street returned to calm; the rain continued and the traffic proceeded. It seemed impossible that a man could die in such a way and in such a short space of time. There might never have been an accident. The speedy removal of the evidence seemed almost a desire to remove all trace and memory of the incident.

The thought of pleasure seemed wrong. The friends knew they could hardly go to dinner and pretend that nothing had happened. Something had, something important—a man had died. Even if he was a stranger it was proper to show some respect. The party ended early and the two couples left for their homes.

The next day Mike Bell caught his usual train—the 8:15 from Sevenoaks to Charing Cross. Like many commuters he had formed a pattern of behavior, a pattern based on habit and experience. The same train, the same corner seat, buying the same newspaper at the same place. Like others, his movements were precise, his timetable unvaried.

On reaching town the memory of the night returned. For a moment, he paused and considered avoiding passing the newsvendor's usual pitch. Then it seemed too superstitious so he strode on, head bowed, moving briskly. As he passed the stand a voice stopped him,

"Here you are, guv! Here's your paper!"

Mike stared at the old face, the red nose thickened by drink, the heavy eyebrows and the watery eyes. He shook his head mechanically and the old man offered the newspaper again. Mike recovered and took the paper. He turned and walked away fighting the impulse to turn and stare. It seemed essential to keep calm, to wait until the incident could be considered calmly.

That was the account Mike Bell gave to me in my office on the morning of August 4, 1959. At my request he had told the story in detail, leaving nothing out whether it struck him as relevant or not.

"What do you make of it, John? Funny, isn't it? Or am I going mad or something?"

"The important point is that you weren't alone—the others saw the same thing. They will be able to support your version?"

Mike Bell thought so, although I was the first one he had consulted, and I asked him to leave the matter with me so that I could make some inquiries.

The first thing was to check the possibility of mistaken identity. Sergeant Balham of the local station was an old friend and eager to help. He knew the newspaper seller in question and gave a brief biography—Charlie Watts, age at least 70, home address in Hackney, character good. It seemed Charlie had worked the pitch for longer than anyone could remember. He was a part of the area, as permanent as Nelson's Column.

On one point he was certain—Charlie Watts had certainly not been involved in any accident on the night in question. He was also able to report that there had been no accidents of any kind in the area. . . .

It was an intriguing start, but only a start. Duncan and Helen Foster were able to keep a luncheon appointment and agreed to answer my questions. Their evidence was convincing and detailed. Helen Foster described the incident with obvious emotion.

"Everything seemed to stand still. He was just standing there, the bundle of papers under his arm. The car just mowed him down. It was *horrible!*"

Duncan's version was the same as his wife's. "I suppose it was the rain. Bad sort of night for driving. You know the way lights dazzle on the wet road. Sometimes you can hardly see anything . . . bad luck if you hit somebody. I must say, I don't think anyone could be blamed. It was just one of those things—sad, but there it is."

Their stories fitted exactly with Mike Bell's account. If there was collusion it was extraordinary in its detail. They agreed about the major events and also about the smaller items which could have gone unnoticed.

When I asked if they could have been mistaken they looked astonished. I then pointed out that the man they had described as being dead, Charlie Watts, was alive and well. Further, there had been no accidents of the kind they had described in the area at the appropriate time. Duncan Foster shrugged, "Well, that's what we saw. There's no way of getting away from it. Four people saw the same thing. Eye witnesses, I may say—not second hand observers. I tell you we saw it happen; if the police don't know about it that's their fault, not ours."

He was adamant, quite firm in his opinion—which only

made the matter more puzzling. The obvious person to see was the key principal in the drama, Charlie Watts. He was at his post as usual and quite prepared to pass the time of day.

After some talk about the weather I switched to the previous night and said, "Understand you had a near miss last night. The traffic can be bad along here. Some people think pedestrians have no right on the roads at all."

"Not me . . . you must be thinking of somebody else."

"No, I'm sure it was you," I insisted. "Some friends were in the pub and saw it from the window."

"I'd remember, wouldn't I?" he said. "Believe me, I've been around here a long time. I keep an eye on the cars—I've been doing it for years. I don't want to be taken in my prime."

He was still chuckling at his joke when I left. Obviously, there was total disagreement about what had happened on the night of August 3. From all the available evidence Mike Bell and his wife and Duncan Foster and his wife were totally wrong. Yet they struck me as sober, reliable witnesses, not particularly given to self-deception.

That night I traveled to Sevenoaks to have dinner with Mike and Jane Bell and, although we talked casually, they were clearly concerned about my investigation and finally Mike had to ask what I had found.

I explained that all my inquiries were negative. It seemed that they were wrong, that they had been the victims of some trick of the light or imagination. The newspaper seller was alive—and had never been in danger. It was impossible to theorize because there was very little to base a theory on. There was their evidence and the factual evidence. There was no doubt that the factual evidence was stronger.

Jane listened but still repeated the story, the incident they had seen.

"It was so real! We all just stood there—and after it we reacted as normal people would to an accident. We went home quietly. It wasn't imagination—I mean, the four of us couldn't have seen exactly the same vision or whatever you'd call it at the same time."

I had to point out that this was possible, there are documented cases of mass hysteria and hypnosis. The number of people involved does not necessarily reduce the likelihood of inaccuracy. Mass delusion is as possible as personal delusion.

Jane argued that mass delusions generally happen to more primitive people, which has some truth. They saw the incident in London—four people with no history of mysticism, second sight or any other form of extra sensory perception. Then there was the man—the news vendor. That wasn't just a person—it was an individual they were able to name.

That, of course, was incorrect. Mike Bell was the only one who knew the news vendor by sight. They had seen the incident from a distance, through glass. It would be difficult to identify anyone under such circumstances—almost impossible when the man to be identified is a comparative stranger.

Mike accepted this argument readily. I was slightly surprised but it was starting to make sense to me. Perhaps because Mike was a realistic sort of man he was eager for any kind of rational explanation.

"There you are, Jane," he said. "That's it—some kind of trick of the light. Just one of those things. As John says, the evidence is against us. I stopped believing in fairies a long time ago and I'm not going to start now. I must admit I'm beginning to wonder if I wasn't mistaken. . . ."

He seemed satisfied, but I returned to London with the uneasy knowledge that the case was far from over. The explanations I had offered were clearly unacceptable. I knew they made less sense than their claims. But it was, perhaps, desirable that they should accept some sort of rational explanation for there was nothing to be gained from them contemplating an area of experience that could be frightening.

That evening I settled for a night of heavy reading. Apart from my extensive files of casebooks there was a library of books dealing with classic cases of psychical phenomena. Occasionally it is possible to find a suggestion link, a comparable explanation from the past. Indeed, very few cases of psychic phenomena show something new. The type of experience has been seen—certainly in a different form—on many previous occasions.

My reading produced nothing except a multitude of half-formed ideas. One thing was becoming clear, however, and that was that the four witnesses to an unknown accident were telling the truth. Whether it was the accepted truth was another matter. Considering the evidence, I believed them.

It was this belief that drew me to the Charing Cross area

on the following nights. The important thing was to be present at the correct time and in the conditions the witnesses had described. The probability was that nothing would happen but there was always the possibility.

Five days later I was waiting in the shadows when Mike Bell almost walked into me. He looked surprised—and guilty—and he talked quickly about being late from the office and rushing to get a train. Then he paused and looked up at the sky and the rain falling in an almost solid stream.

"Okay, I'll admit it," he shrugged. "I was watching old Charlie. I don't know—I just wanted to see if he was all right. I mean, I still can't forget that darned thing we saw. Tonight—well, it's just like it was that night. I just wondered if anything happened, whether I could do anything to help. . . ."

He had expressed my own feelings and we waited for another hour in the gathering darkness. At last, the news-vendor went home and we could do the same.

I continued my watch for another six nights. Nothing disturbed me, apart from the rain and wind. At last, it seemed pointless to continue the observation. The only thing to do was to mark the case as closed—and unexplained. In investigations of this kind failure is common. And it need not be failure. Nothing is discovered because there is nothing to find. The witnesses were genuine, but mistaken.

The explanation would probably occur at some future date when the clear events of that night of August 3 were forgotten.

Two weeks after my watch on Charlie Watts ended I was in my office later than usual. Someone had left an evening newspaper on my desk. I glanced at the headlines but my eyes were drawn to a small paragraph at the bottom of the page.

DEATH OF NEWSBOY, the headline read: "Last night, a 72 year old newsboy, Charlie Watts, was killed when he was hit by a car crossing the street from his pitch in Villiers Street. Police describe conditions at the time of the accident as 'appalling' and it is believed that poor visibility caused the accident."

Of course, there's an explanation. But the only one that I could give my friends would seem so impossible—to them—that they'd never believe me. . . .

THE FRIENDLY GHOST

Many people believe that all ghosts are evil, that all hauntings are malevolent. This is far from the truth. But here is at least one well authenticated manifestation that can only be described as friendly.

When I met Alec Wade he was over seventy years of age and had retired from his job as a research chemist. He was a shrewd, down-to-earth man, and since his student days had been intensely interested in the world of the paranormal.

It was at a meeting of a psychical research organization that I first met him. He told me of an incredible haunting which he was able to witness at first hand. It had occurred when he was a student living alone in a small attic apartment in London about sixty years ago.

For as long as he could remember, Alec had been psychic. When he was shown two small rooms above a warehouse in Battersea, he knew at once that some form of spirit was present there.

His first reaction was to turn the apartment down, but the rooms were not expensive and his curiosity as to the kind of paranormal manifestation residing there had been aroused. He agreed to take the rooms for a trial period of one month.

As soon as he was alone in the apartment he decided to try to establish contact with the presence. Although never an expert medium, he had on a number of previous occasions spoken with the spirit world when in a mediumistic trance. After a short meditation that night, this state was achieved, but no "contact" could be made.

Later that evening, Alec tried the Ouija board. Although Ouija normally requires to be operated by two people, he had sometimes used it successfully on his own. This time, however, it was a failure.

Two experiments having failed, Alec Wade decided to leave his mind open to the possibility of spirit communication. He did nothing else to make contact with the supernatural presence that he could feel so strongly. Whenever

he returned to the rooms, he felt the presence as strong as ever.

It was an eerie feeling. Alec claimed that he was not frightened, only intensely curious to know with whom his apartment was being shared!

Was it a man or woman. . . . was it good or evil? Why was it still maintaining its presence on the earthly plane? These and many other questions he was eager to have answered.

When his trial tenancy was at an end, Alec told the landlord that he would take the place for a further three months. He hoped that the elusive spirit would at last communicate with him.

The only real concern he had then was that, having taken the room for three months, he might discover that the presence was a poltergeist.

But he need not have worried, for no sooner had Alec told the landlord that he was going to remain in the rooms, than his unseen companion at last materialized.

It was a Sunday afternoon. Alec had remained in bed until noon. After a brisk walk he returned to his rooms with the intention of cooking dinner. No sooner had he opened the door, than he saw an old man sitting in the armchair in front of the small fire grate.

On hearing Alec enter, he stood up and turned to face him. He was a jolly-looking man with a kindly face and white hair, dressed in a tweed suit.

Alec realized that although he could see the man as if he were solid substance, with a slight refocusing of his eyes, he could also see straight through him! Alec Wade's phantom roommate had introduced himself at last!

This was not the first ghost that Alec had seen, but it was certainly the friendliest. He greeted the apparition as he would have greeted a living person and the ghost responded with a warm smile and said that he hoped Alec was not afraid.

Talking to a ghost gave Alec a strange feeling of unreality; a feeling that if he pinched himself he would wake up. But at the same time, knowing that he was not asleep, and knowing that he really was communicating with someone who had made that mysterious journey from life to death, he felt strangely moved.

He invited the "old man" to sit down, observing as he did so that—as a ghost—his guest had no physical sensa-

tion, yet it seemed normal for him to let the body do as it would have done in life. And Alec sat down opposite his curious visitor.

The old man immediately began to ask Alec a number of questions. What was he studying? Had he a family? Had he brothers and sisters? Were his parents comfortably off? In fact he wanted to know all from Alec that there was to know.

He answered the old man's questions willingly and then added, lightheartedly, that he would have assumed *him* to know all these things, being a spirit. The man replied that as he had only reached the first phase of his spirit journey, his powers were limited. Alec questioned him as to what he meant by this, but on that subject the old man would say no more.

Alec's first encounter with the old man lasted twenty minutes. After that he returned many times and had many discussions with Alec. The only thing he would not talk about was death. When Alec tried to learn something of this, the old man just smiled, but said nothing.

Five weeks after their first meeting, Alec at last learned the reason why the ghost had maintained his presence in that building. He told Alec that he had died thirty years before.

In his lifetime, however, he had been a wealthy merchant and, in order to avoid government taxes, he had kept two separate records of his business accounts. One was a true record, and this he had kept hidden. The other was false, and this he showed to the authorities.

During his lifetime, he explained, he had amassed a fortune. Much of this he had not put in a bank, but had hidden it in a secret place where he knew nobody would ever find it. He had also given many thousands of pounds away to charitable causes and his intention had always been to give *all* his money to charity before he died.

"Unfortunately," he explained, "we don't always know when that day is going to be, and my turn came sooner than I expected."

Even in death, the fact that he had a vast sum of money hidden away (which if it remained undiscovered could never benefit anyone and which, if it fell into the wrong hands, could do more harm than good), worried him greatly. He then went on to tell Alec that he had owned the building in which they were sitting. It had not contained

any living apartments then, and what were now Alec's rooms, had been a loft. It was in this loft that he had made his cache.

The ghost then explained that he had been waiting, ever since his death, to find somebody to whom he could entrust his secret and whom he knew would carry out his wishes. On hearing this, Alec voiced surprise that he should have waited for such a long time, but the old man explained that in the spirit world, time is a different dimension and the waiting had been no trouble. He also explained to Alec that it was of great importance that before continuing his spirit journey, the fruit of his earthly labors should be put to the best possible use. This, he said, was of vital moral importance, and he would never be able to rest easy until this had been done.

The old man then told Alec that he knew that in him he had at last found a person whom he could trust, and without waiting for either promise or expression of good intent, he told Alec where to find the money. Alec soon retrieved the hoard and it was indeed a fortune—a vast sum comprised almost entirely of gold sovereigns. The account book was also there, written up in a neat, precise hand. "That will do a lot of good for a lot of people," Alec's ghostly friend told him. "Now I will tell you what I want you to do with it."

His instructions were precise. Alec wrote them all down. From the account book they were able to see exactly what was available, and everything was allocated to a good cause: a children's home, a church charity, an old people's home, hospitals, the list seemed never ending. Eventually, except for a sum of one hundred pounds, all the money had been allocated.

This last sum the ghost donated to Alec, telling him to use the money as he thought best.

Even before Alec had time to utter his thanks, the old man had stood up, thanked him for all his help, wished him a happy life—and vanished!

Alec knew at once that he would never see him again, and all that remained to testify that the old man had ever been there was the vast pile of money which now lay stacked neatly on the floor.

During the following days, Alec did as the old man had instructed him, and the money was presented "from an anonymous well wisher" to the various causes he had named.

With part of the money which he himself had been given, Alec bought a set of text books which he urgently needed for his studies. But he did not spend the rest of the money on himself.

Influenced greatly by the wonderful old man, he presented the sixty sovereigns that remained to a local charity. Or to be perfectly truthful, all the sixty, but for one.

That golden coin he had kept as a constant reminder of a man who must have been great in life, and who had retained all his humility, kindness, and benevolence in death.

When I first met Alec Wade at that meeting, he showed me the gold sovereign that he had kept all those years and I knew that keeping it always on his person had had a considerable effect on his own life. It had been for him, a symbol of everything that was good.

Until his own death in 1956, Alec Wade was one of the most respected men in his profession, one who was known for his honesty and generosity.

I also thought him to be one of the most sincere men I had ever known. Yet, was this story a hoax . . . a subtle "leg-pull"?

After his death, I made some investigations and I found that, indeed, large sums of money had been anonymously donated to the charities he had named and the records showed that all this money had been in gold sovereigns!

I also checked the deeds and records of sale of the building in which Alec had lived as a student. This investigation brought to light the fact that until 1872 the property had belonged to George Henry Bunyon, wealthy merchant, benefactor, and Freeman of the City of London.

"THEY'RE BURYING ME!"

Late on a November evening in 1912, Dr. William Brodie was leisurely preparing for bed. His study never looked more inviting. In the hearth, a great fire blazed, its ruddy glow falling on the crowded, untidy room filled with its hundreds of books, its objects brought from across half the world. Brodie was a bachelor and his elderly housekeeper

had the strictest instructions to leave this room completely alone.

It was chronically untidy—but that was how he liked it and it suited the man himself, a great, bear-like figure dressed in shaggy, shabby clothes. Even in his old age, he gave the impression of immense strength.

He had spent an unusually relaxed evening. Despite his seventy years, he was still immensely active. His scholarly reputation was great and he was a member of a wide variety of committees, each of which demanded, and received, a considerable expenditure of time and energy. Rarely did he spend an evening alone; friends seeking the entertainment of his salty, pungent wit, ex-students still seeking his guidance, neighbors proud of their famous fellow citizen—one or other of these would invariably turn up casually.

He welcomed the ringing of his doorbell; any visitor, expected or unexpected, was shepherded into the large, comfortable study and there, whether his visit was destined to be brief or long, made thoroughly at home. William Brodie liked human beings.

It was, perhaps, because he had spent an evening alone that he now felt restless and curiously uneasy. The house was empty—but it always was when his visitors had departed. Usually, he liked the feeling of space and quietness, the knowledge that he could wander from room to room without encountering another person to interrupt his train of thought. He liked his fellow man—but he also liked solitude and his way of life included provisions for both.

But tonight he would have welcomed even the garrulous housekeeper. Frowning, he peered into the half empty glass in his hand. "What exactly is it?" he said aloud, his trained mind dissecting, analyzing the unusual sensation. At length he gave it up and decided to retire for the night.

"Peter," he said suddenly. "Now why should I think of Peter." He had seen his friend Peter Rolfe just ten days ago: they would meet again, as was their custom, in four day's time. Rolfe was apparently in perfect health when they had last met: he had confessed no particular worries. Why therefore should his name occur with such poignancy at this moment?

Brodie got into bed still with the same unease which he was unable to dismiss. Peter Rolfe; they had known each other for nearly forty years. Brodie's career had taken him around the world; Rolfe had lived all his life within a few

miles of where he was born. Brodie was a scholar of international repute; Rolfe was a humble vet—yet the lives of the two men had become curiously intertwined. Suddenly Brodie had an overpowering urge to see his friend and decided to do so the very next day.

Within minutes of falling asleep that night he woke with an insistent cry in his ear. "Will, Will—they're burying me!" So vivid was that impression of fear, so clear the cry that he gazed wildly around the room almost expecting to see the face of Peter Rolfe. But the room lay quiet in moonlight.

"My imagination is getting out of hand," was how he described his thoughts later. "Bodiless voices in the night. What next, I wonder."

He passed the remainder of the night uneasily, neither sleeping or waking, but in a nightmarish condition between the two. In the morning he felt wretched and out of sorts.

"I'm going over to see Mr. Rolfe this morning," he remarked casually to the housekeeper at breakfast. "The day out will do me good. I had a terrible night."

Reluctantly, he put the memory of the night out of his mind after breakfast and settled to work in his study with strict orders that he was not to be disturbed. The problems at hand required all his concentration and the morning slid past before he was aware of it. At midday, to his surprise and annoyance there was a loud knock at the door. He called to whoever was there to enter.

But the door remained closed and then, as clearly as though the words had been spoken, he heard the same phrase as the night before. "Will, Will, they're burying me!"

Brodie jerked to his feet, his work forgotten. Either he was going out of his mind, or. . . .

In either case, it was time that he laid this phantom.

William Brodie possessed one of the first motor cars that the village had ever seen. He had endured much jocular teasing about his affection for the gleaming, snorting monster and now, as he frantically swung the starting handle, he wondered if he had been ill-advised to abandon old-fashioned but certain horse transport for this speedy, but highly temperamental machine. For once the engine responded instantly and minutes later he was on the road, making good time.

He arrived at Rolfe's small cottage at about three o'clock in the afternoon. Rolfe was a childless widower and, except for his relationship with Brodie, was virtually a recluse. He

conducted his profession from a small surgery in Oxford, returning to his home outside working hours and rarely leaving it.

It was, therefore, with considerable surprise that Brodie caught a glimpse of two or three men through the little parlor window as he brought his motor to a halt and leaped down.

He felt, if anything, even more uneasy by then. What explanation was he to give Rolfe for this sudden unexpected visit? A visit made, moreover, not to the surgery where Rolfe normally spent his days, but to his cottage? For the life of him Brodie himself could not give an explanation as to why he had driven here, rather than into the town.

There was no doubting the identity of two of the men in the parlor. They were undertakers in their lugubrious costume with the fantastic black bows that their profession demanded. The other man he recognized slightly—a doctor.

"What's wrong?" he demanded and then, in answer to their surprised expression "I'm a friend of Mr. Rolfe's."

"I'm afraid Mr. Rolfe is dead," said the doctor.

"When did it happen?"

"Two days ago. It was very sudden apparently."

"What do you mean—apparently?"

"Well, as you know, Rolfe lives entirely by himself—neither does he have any assistance at the surgery. It was the milkman who discovered him. He noticed that the milk hadn't been taken in, remembered that Rolfe had not been at all well over the past few days—and so he entered through one of the windows. He was dead then."

The doctor nodded discreetly at the undertakers. "These gentlemen were about to take the coffin to the Chapel of Rest."

"I see," Brodie said again. He felt immensely depressed at this evidence of the total friendlessness of Rolfe. To be surrounded only by strangers. Why he, Brodie, himself would not be here but for . . . what?

The house already had a dead, empty feeling and Brodie shivered slightly. His own home was untidy, but with a cheerful, living untidiness produced by an excess of energy. Rolfe's home bore the impression of a defeated spirit. Obviously, ever since his wife had died he had lost heart. Dust lay thick everywhere: the curtains were stiff with dirt, piles of books and old newspapers littered the corners. No won-

der that Rolfe had been reluctant to invite him in and that they usually met in Brodie's own house.

"Did you know Mrs. Rolfe?" he abruptly asked the doctor.

The young man shook his head. "I've only recently had this practice," he said. "And, as you know, Rolfe wasn't exactly the most outgoing of people."

The tiny, cramped bedroom was almost dark, for the curtains were drawn across the narrow dormer window. The old fashioned double bed had been pushed hard into one corner, leaving space for a pair of trestles. The coffin stood upon them, dark and ominous in the little room.

"It isn't screwed down," the doctor said in reply to Brodie's unspoken question. Together, they lifted the lid and Brodie peered down at the form of his friend.

"That's curious," the doctor said after a moment's silence. There seemed to be an uneasiness in his voice and Brodie looked at him sharply.

"I could have sworn that he was lying on his back."

Brodie looked down again. Rolfe's head was clearly in profile, the eyes staring unseeingly at the wood inches away. Memory of the nightmare he had endured flooded painfully into Brodie's mind. With a strangled cry he crossed the room and tore the dingy curtains back so that light poured in onto the coffin. He came back and unceremoniously elbowed his companion to one side and then bent closely over the figure in the coffin. Rolfe was alive!

Later that night, Brodie sat on the edge of the bed while Rolfe feebly took the first nourishment he had had in four days.

"If it hadn't been for you," Rolfe whispered.

Brodie shrugged. "I don't profess to account for it, but it was real enough at the time. And it's going to be even more real for that incompetent fool of a doctor."

Rolfe protested feebly. "He's young—but not altogether to blame. Catalepsy is quite common among animals—and not all that uncommon among humans. It is, after all, a defense mechanism in an impossible situation. Raccoons play dead when there's no other way out."

"You're not a raccoon," Brodie said shortly.

"No?" Rolfe's smile was infinitely sad. "Wouldn't you say that I'm in an impossible situation?" He gestured at the squalid room. "Since my wife's death. . . ."

"What happened three days ago?" Brodie asked as the other fell silent.

"It was a nightmare," Rolfe said soberly. "A living nightmare. I could hear everything, I knew exactly what was happening—but I couldn't move a muscle. Everything then went black—I suppose I fell unconscious—how long I don't know."

"Do you remember calling to me—saying, 'Will, they're burying me?'"

"No—I've no recollection of that at all. I can remember only the terrible feeling as they lowered me into—into the coffin. But we've always been close, you and I, and I suppose. . . ."

Brodie nodded. "As I said, it was real enough at the time. Real enough to make me risk making a fool of myself."

"And then, presumably under the stimulus of extreme terror, I must have moved—moved enough to make it obvious that I wasn't dead when you looked into the coffin."

Brodie sat for a long time in silence, began to speak and then looked more closely at his friend. Rolfe had fallen into a deep sleep. Gently, Brodie drew the covers around the sleeping form and then settled himself as comfortable as he could in a chair. There was a long wait until dawn.

THE WANDERING GHOST

The occult is a subject that can be studied for years and, in the past, many men gave up the greater part of their lives to do so, but no one can ever say, or has ever been able to say, that most of the subject was even partly known. Whenever someone has been foolish enough to state a certain set of occult rules as dogma, there have always been several exceptions that finally disprove it.

One of the commonest dogmatic statements about the occult is that ghosts and poltergeists are confined to one place; that the actual scene of the haunting, or manifestation can, or may, never move. One exception to this rule is the famous case of the workman whose spirit haunted Brunel's fantastic iron ship, the *Great Eastern*, which crossed oceans—and always took the spirit with it. Another, which should

help to disprove the old rule that ghosts may haunt only one place, is the strange and uncanny story of the wandering ghost.

One of the oldest inhabited and least known parts of England lies in the southeastern corner. Overrun by the German tribes in antiquity it yet keeps their name and geographical area. Essex, the country of the East Saxons, has retained in its salt marshes and quiet countryside bordering the sea some of the charm of the British Tourist Board posters and more than a hint of mysticism. Large parts have been ravished by the greedy sprawl of London but the rest is so close to the capital that it is too near for a weekend trip and not far enough for a full scale holiday.

Perhaps because of this, the people of north and east Essex have gone about their business as if their part of the country was still cut off from England by the Thames marshes, as it was for centuries. Families have lived there for more centuries than there are days in the week. It is, to be a little less than dogmatic, a strong possibility that the longer established a family has been, the higher the chances of a psychic rapport being built up with its home. Something intangible is passed on when generation after generation has lived and died in the same few square miles. It is with one of these families, the Finbers of Trowse-Paget, that the wandering ghost is associated.

A good many years ago, when is not remembered, one of the Finbers burst into his house shouting that he was being followed and would the men of the house come out with him to lay the insolent stranger by the heels. As sons and farm hands tumbled out into the open they heard that an unknown man in a blue coat had been seen standing in the middle of one of the Finber cornfields. The incensed farmer promptly shouted at him to get out of the field, get off his land and was astounded when the stranger took no notice. Thinking to chase him off, the farmer plunged into the waist-high crop, treading between the stalks and moved towards him—or rather where he had been. As he looked up, having dropped his eyes to negotiate the narrow furrows, he stopped in amazement. The other had vanished.

Hardly believing his eyes, the farmer waded on till he came to the place where the stranger had been standing, and was pleased and puzzled in equal proportions to find no trace of the man—not so much as a footprint or a bent stalk. It was as he was returning home that he caught out

of the corner of his eye a brief glimpse of somebody following him—a man wearing a blue coat. All attempts to hide and ambush the stranger were unlucky and the farmer arrived home fuming. Perhaps it is needless to say that his kinsfolk found nothing and saw less. Even the dogs exhibited no interest when taken to where the stranger had stood. There was apparently not even a sniff that their keen noses could detect; or maybe what they did scent awakened no particular reaction.

After that brief and puzzling excitement discussion and speculation began to die—but the memory lingered. So long did it remain buried in the memories of that stolid family that one might have thought it forgotten. When the blue coated stranger was seen again so many years had passed that it had long ceased to be mentioned.

There can be little doubt therefore that when young Jonathan asked his mother who the old gent in blue was that looked through the window he was not imagining something or pulling someone's leg. Children of eight often prattle and Johnny's mother took no particular notice at first, until his insistent queries drove her far enough to exasperation to actually listen to him. "What 'old gent'?" The housewife pulled the door open angrily and beheld a yard innocent of anything except a farm dog. This animal lay a dozen yards or so from the house and would have seen any Peeping Tom, yet it was comatose, dozing peacefully, and only woke when called to.

Jonathan was adamant that there had been a stranger, or someone he had never seen before, looking through the window at him and his mother; he was equally certain that he had worn a blue jacket or overcoat. His mother was almost convinced by his story yet how could she reconcile the sleeping farm dog with it? It happened to be an excellent guard. If there *had* been someone there the animal must surely have recognized his footsteps and therefore not bothered to bark its customary challenge.

When her husband came home that evening, she told him the puzzling story of the vanishing stranger—and was shaken when her husband, far from laughing and identifying a business acquaintance, began talking of another Finber who had seen something similar years before. The child was summoned but could add nothing more to his story. "Just an old gent," was all he said, and he soon forgot about it.

His parents did not. Easily the most baffling thing was the

utter lack of interest shown by the dog. Had it been a real spook, as they told each other, every dog in the place would have yammered its head off. And anyway, whoever heard of a ghost walking under the afternoon sun? Another odd thing, Jonathan's parents remarked to each other, was that neither their child nor his anonymous kinsfolk of another generation had mentioned even so much as a twinge of fear. It began to look as if their blue-coated wanderer was either a very unghostlike ghost, or a very, very old man, his previous appearance having been at least forty years before.

This time the story did not die and the rest of this far-scattered family were intrigued enough to remember it on and off for some ten years. Not even the whole family, when it slowly chewed the matter over, could even begin to put either a name to their visitor or a reason for his appearance. It seemed unconnected with either births, deaths, good or ill luck of which such apparitions are normally the omen. Eventually, the Finbers, who enjoyed that most English of virtues, a reputation for stolid, earthy common sense, decided that as the man in blue damaged nothing and frightened no one he could well be ignored if and when he turned up again.

Such an attitude is not nearly as dim-witted as it sounds. Many people who are said to be psychic and are open to unknown streams of consciousness accept their burden as just another sense, and often prefer to say nothing about it. In the same way people who live in mildly haunted houses neglect to inform anyone else. It might after all affect the value of the property. To the Finbers, their rarely seen apparition was just as much a part of life as cows and grass, and was accepted as such.

There the matter might have rested and never come to knowledge had it not been for the outbreak of the Second World War.

With the introduction of conscription it was beyond the thoughts of every young man to escape the armed forces' service. From mines, factories and farms they came, put on uniforms, but remained essentially the same people. The unique story of the wandering ghost takes its final twist with the conscription of three cousins, related to the original Finbers, into the armed forces of the crown.

The three were conscripted together, trained together and finally sent to the same unit in the approved tradition. One of them was Jonathan, grown now to a man of 20, whose

thoughts, when they were not about girls were mostly about ways to stay alive in the searing heat of the North African desert. He and his cousins' footslogged from dune to dune, fought, retreated, stood and fought and advanced again from Tobruk to Tripoli. In between actions they talked about the quiet countryside of Essex and the slow changing village where they were born.

Significantly it was on such a night, when they were heavy with sentiment and homesickness, that the incredible happened. The sharp rattle of a suddenly cocked rifle and a tension-fierce challenge brought them to full alert. The sentry was peering forward intently. The desert's brilliant moon illumined the sand hills around them, bringing every fold and ripple out in knife edge clarity, and deepening every shadow. Some of the men thought they saw a movement where the sentry indicated, and one of them, a trigger happy rookie, loosed off a shot. It might have been a late patrol, a harmless wandering Arab, or a spying German patrol but, as no cry came, his angry comrades relaxed. A patrol later failed to find any traces of humanity within miles of their positions and the luckless sentry had to put up with a great deal of ribbing. His insistence that he had seen somebody, not just something, out there began to convince, however unwillingly, the three cousins—for he claimed that the man he had seen was wearing no recognizable uniform but had looked to be wearing a blue jacket.

The wandering stranger, out here? Any doubts they may have had were shaken some months later when Jonathan and a cousin were on leave in Cairo. Their kinsman was slightly wounded and they were left to sample the delights of this capital of the Orient without the asset of a third pair of fists.

As they penetrated deeper into the out-of-bounds area known as the "bazaar" they grew more uneasy. They were lost and looking for a way of escape. At this crisis in the affairs of the British Empire, her soldiers were always liable to find to a knife in the back in such places—and right now the Arabs were looking distinctly hostile.

Just as they rounded a corner the cousin, looking guiltily over his shoulder, whispered they were being followed. Both listened and heard nothing particularly furtive behind them. Visible Arabs, while looking unfriendly, were not actually looking murderous. On they went, anxious now to find some safe retreat.

A little later both Englishmen were conscious of a third person close behind, half hidden in the crowd of Arabs—and the one glimpse they had was enough. The other, a European, was wearing a blue coat of some kind.

At that moment and in that place both felt an unaccountable gladness. It was like a breath of home in a rather nasty situation. Intrigued, despite the crowd of jostling Arabs whose mutterings as it followed were growing ever more ominous, the cousins tried to catch a glimpse of their enigmatic "friend." But, as before, all attempts were useless. The crowd at their heels obscured the strange one in its midst. Curiously the Arabs paid no attention to the third European. It was as if they knew him well enough to ignore him—or couldn't see him.

It was the very size of the muttering throng that trailed them that finally proved to be their salvation. Military Police, attracted by the noise, moved in, arrested the two cousins, whisked them to safety—and a mild sentence. As they drove off the cousins asked them to look out for the other man, wearing what might be civilian clothing. But the stranger was no longer visible.

Throughout the remaining war years, their "boy in blue" was seen twice more, and on neither occasion could any significance be attached to his appearance. Even when one of the cousins was killed in action, and when the surviving pair were actually expecting a visit nothing happened. Neither their dead cousin nor the old man put in an appearance.

At no time, either then or in his sole subsequent visit, has it been possible to see the ghost's face, or even identify the period of his clothing. With what, then, are we left?

The Finbers themselves are convinced that the apparition can only be one of their ancestors who was so closely bound to his land that he has never been able to leave it. They also feel certain that he is not evil, for no fear attends his coming and he is apparently free to wander through the sunlight. For his subsequent reappearance in North Africa they confess themselves baffled but contend that his apparent visit was more likely to be a hallucination than otherwise. Both cousins were thinking of home when the wandering ghost put in its first foreign appearance. They jumped to the conclusion it was their family ghost after hearing the sentry's excited description of what could have been anything; it was not, after all, seen clearly. As for the other "visions," they were seen merely because the idea was

already in their minds; a brief glimpse of an Arab wearing a blue "mufti" in the bazaar, was seen by them as their familiar old man—and they thereby comforted themselves with the thought.

That is the Finbers' explanation and it is a good one—but it takes no account of the fact that on the important occasions detailed above none of the cousins were actually thinking of the apparition itself. Their conversation was either about home, on the first occasion, and entirely about ways of saving their skin on the second. Neither attitude was conducive to hallucinatory apparitions.

An alternative theory, however, can be made. Granted that the figure of the old man in a blue coat actually does exist (and the family does not deny this), and that it is closely related to the soil its family tills today, might it not be that it is as closely linked to the Finbers themselves? *They*, in fact, are being haunted, not the land. Surely the ghost, if ghost it is, could be attracted to the young cousins so far away if they were thinking, not about the apparition but about the land—the very land that holds so powerful an attraction for the shade itself.

Closely linked as the Finbers have been, and are, with their little part of Essex, the psychic intensity of the cousins' longing concentration was at least as powerful as the love for the same land held by the Finbers left behind. Across what illimitable distance of time and space would this magnetic pull not exert itself—and influence the shadow of the old man itself? Thus, once the jump from England to Africa is made the psychic link remains and at intermittent intervals is crossed.

The result: a ghost which wanders from the quiet land of the East Saxons to the roaring, sun-blasted hell of the Desert Campaign.

ARMY OF THE DEAD

Fritz Hagen was lost—an unpleasant experience at any time in the High Alps and particularly unpleasant because it was his own fault.

It had been a beautiful morning—bright, clear and brac-

ing, with a tremendous arc of blue sky to tempt the most unwary onwards to the summits. It was not as though it was a particularly difficult climb from Isseran over the neck of the pass into the next valley. Why, there was even a restaurant at the top—a restaurant to which the less hardy could travel in comfort by coach. Impatient to get on, to pass the next crest and the next and so come at last to the high road which led down to Susa and to Italy, he had ignored the warning of the villagers.

For Fritz Hagen was the last man in this world who could be accused of being superstitious.

"There'll be a thick mist before nightfall. That path is not as easy as it looks—and there are the *other* things! Wait for the rest of the party, monsieur, I beg you!"

But he had not bothered to wait. He was due back at Heidelberg University in a little over ten days. He was no mountaineer—this was just a detour—a quick look around above the snowline to satisfy an easily satisfied curiosity.

Frankly, there wasn't much to see. Once you had become accustomed to the novelty of being so many thousands of feet above sea level the view soon palled. Endless banks of scree stretching up in trying but undramatic slopes. The view at the top was worth it, for there was no cloud, but one mountain peak was much like another to his jaundiced eye.

Over the crest—or possibly over the next one—there lay a main road along which a highly irregular and very infrequent bus ran. He reckoned he would save at least two days of his precious time by striking out immediately. The distance to the road could not be more than ten miles or so—barely a day's brisk scramble.

So, lightheartedly, he had set out about nine o'clock expecting to reach the restaurant by about two in the afternoon. At about two o'clock he scrambled, breathlessly, at the head of a long scree slope and was slightly disconcerted to see that the restaurant was not in its expected place. Ahead of him lay another valley undistinguishable from the one he had just come through. A bewildering mass of tumbled boulders with a few tough plants in the crevices, an occasional pocket of snow—and then the whole uninspiring spectacle was repeated on the far slope.

At four o'clock he was still only half way up the next slope and it was six o'clock before he again scrambled to the crest—and again saw nothing but rocks ahead.

But this time there was a difference. Until now the climb-

ing and descent had been merely exhausting. This part of the mountain's summit was essentially undulating rather than precipitous, with seeming endless waves of scree and boulders to impede rather than threaten.

What lay ahead was an enormous gash rather than a valley, a titanic chasm which opened into another and yet another in a bewildering series. In spite of his fatigue, in spite of the mocking remarks he had made about these famous Alps, he felt awe creep over him. Far below him he could make out a silvery gleam, but whether it was a road or a river the uncertain light made it difficult to ascertain.

So he decided to turn back, and wearily climbed back up the few feet to the crest.

Then he stopped dead at the top. With infuriating precision the Alpine climate had justified the prophecies of the villagers. In the lower level the mist had already gathered.

From ground level that mist would have looked like white wool—an attractive cloud floating on the summit. Close to it was a gray, cold enveloping entity, the age-old enemy of the mountaineer, far more dangerous than the more dramatic hazard of avalanche.

Behind him—mist; before him, unknown and dangerous looking territory. But it was at least clear there. The thermals coming up those ravines would disperse all but the heaviest mist. To clinch his resolve he saw what he took to be a light shining fitfully on the floor of the ravine. Setting his teeth, he began the long climb downwards.

An hour after he started the descent the light that attracted him disappeared and it was another hour before he found what had been the source—a small lake whose still crystal clear water had caught the last gleams of the sun and sent forth a false comfort.

For it was now completely dark and with something akin to horror Hagen realized that a thin mist was beginning to form even down here. If it got any worse. . . . There was nothing for it but to camp for the night and carry on at first light.

It was a night of excruciating discomfort for he was not prepared for sleeping rough. The equipment in his bag was intended for hotel bedrooms, not the bare shoulder of a granite mountain. At midnight a bitter wind arose and though it froze him to the marrow he realized that there was no point in going back—even if he could find his way.

There was a chance that there might be a road at the bottom.

It was the beginning of two nightmarish days. Sometime during the first day he reached the bottom of the ravine and found not a road, but a river—a narrow, rushing ice-cold torrent of green water. It was, in a way, welcome, for he was parched with thirst having long since emptied the contents of his vacuum flask. He drank, refilled the flask and looked for a crossing. It was late afternoon before he found a point narrow enough and, with his heart in his mouth, jumped.

At the other side he hesitated. It was quite impossible now for him to climb the further slope—and to what purpose? He was becoming lightheaded now and, almost indifferently, turned left at random.

All that day he trudged beside the river until it disappeared under a rock. Still almost indifferently he took the line of least resistance, climbing slightly but still far below the edge. The mist came and went like a restless ghost as one moment it triumphed over the wind currents, and the next succumbed to them.

He had no memory of where he spent the next night, nor how. He ate the last of the provisions he had packed so lightheartedly for a day's stroll, drank cold water and fell into the sleep of exhaustion.

The following day was a repetition of the first. Deeper and deeper he penetrated into the literal maze of intersecting chasms. The sides grew ever steeper, the bottoms narrow. He did not know it, but he was in the ancient heart of the Alps themselves and not the easy-going foothills.

Late on the evening of the second day he came to a kind of junction. Immediately below him there was a drop of some 20 feet or so, behind him the ravine rose sheer for hundreds of feet. From where he was half standing, half leaning, he could see at least four other ravines leading out. Any, or all of them might simply lead to a dead end. Perhaps, then he should retrace his steps. But that, clearly, was impossible in his exhausted condition and without food.

As he leaned wearily back against the rough wall, the mist descended again thicker than ever. But a wind arose, an errant current of air that tore the mist into long banners. High over head the sun still shone brilliantly, but down here the gloom of night had already come. The dusk and the dancing banners of mist created a phantasmagoria.

And as, almost unseeingly, his glance rested on the ravine almost opposite, he became aware of vague figures moving along the track on its farther side. Galvanized, he stood erect, straining his eyes, cursing the mist as it descended again and veiled the figures. He shouted, but the wind took his voice away. Then momentarily, the mist was rent and he could see as clearly as the dusk allowed him. Coming around the spur of the ravine and marching away from him was a long file of men. They were too distant, and the light too uncertain, for him to make out any detail of their features or costume.

Bringing up the rear was what he took to be some kind of pack animal—a huge, misshapen creature. But *was* it misshapen? Or was it merely heavily laden? It was an elephant, a part of his mind insisted but his reason rejected what he thought his eyes had seen.

The mist returned and did not lift again for a long while. And when it did, the figures were gone and the ravine lay empty before him.

But the vision had given him new hope. That long file of men was obviously following a road and, sobbing with fear and hope and exhaustion, he scrambled across the intervening distance, climbed the farther slope and found a rough path.

How far he walked that night he never knew. Once he collapsed, but whether he slept or fainted no one could have told. When the gray light of dawn came, he saw that the narrow mouth of the ravine had widened: the slopes on each side were less precipitous. By full daylight, he had entered a wide valley. Rough pasturage lay at the side and the musical jangle of goatbells came like a message of salvation. Further down there stood a primitive cottage and he stumbled towards it and collapsed as the surprised goat-herd emerged.

"He saved my life," Hagen said simply and took another deep pull of beer. He looked around thankfully at his familiar room—the battered desk heaped high with books and papers, the fireplace with its leaping, comforting blaze and across at his friend sunk deep in an armchair. There was a long silence which the other broke.

"What *do* you think that animal was?"

"I think it was an elephant," Hagen said soberly. "A war elephant."

"And the men?"

Hagen twisted uneasily in his chair. "There weren't any men—nor was there any animal." The goatherd had confirmed that. An army of men like that couldn't have passed his cottage without his being aware of it.

"All right—but what do you *think* you saw?" the other insisted. "After all, you did follow them—and they did lead you out."

"I think I saw Africans . . . Carthaginians," Hagen said heavily. "I think I found Hannibal's lost route through the Alps. I think I saw Hannibal's army marching down to Rome."

REST IN PEACE

At one time the mansion had been beautiful and elegant, but by 1910 it sagged with neglect. The once trim gardens around it were buried beneath rank grass, the paths were overgrown with weeds, and a dank, decaying atmosphere hung over even the parts of the house that were still occupied.

Two men stood looking up at the blind windows. One was the Reverend John Tewin, a robust, cheerful, middle-aged man. The other was in his seventies, a ruined giant of a man. Once he would have stood well over six feet, but age and illness had withered him.

His name was John Maxton and the house at which he looked with a curious expression of contempt and nostalgia was the house in which he had been born. He had returned there to die. He knew that. . . .

Forty years before he had lived at the Hall, contentedly enough, with his elder brother Robert. The fact that Robert was squire, that he himself would only be the "younger son" meant nothing to John. From childhood the brothers had been friendly, but, as they had grown into manhood, each had developed quite different tastes and different circles of friends. Yet these differences had only served to strengthen the bonds of friendship between them—until Robert's marriage.

What had really happened, Tewin wondered as together he and John Maxton walked up to the front door. There

had been no lack of rumors. At first, the threesome had seemed to work. John retained his old bachelor quarters in the west wing, and Robert and Anne took over the rest of the house. Each had all the privacy needed, and at the same time enjoyed each other's company as a family group.

Then had come that bitter quarrel between the brothers. It was, of course, over Anne. Tewin only had Robert's version of it—a version expressed in spluttering rage—incoherent, venomous: for a year, John had tried to seduce his brother's wife—a year in which everything seemed to go smoothly on the surface. But beneath the surface a bitter fight went on.

Or so ran Robert's account. But to Tewin, who knew and respected John Maxton, it seemed unlikely that he would turn from an affectionate brother-in-law to would-be seducer. He remembered John's cryptic remark—the only comment he ever made to anyone outside the family. "Remember Potiphar's wife?" It could mean only one thing. That it was the wife, Anne, who had been the would-be seducer and, failing, in revenge had accused him of bursting in upon her while Robert was absent from the house. After that terrible scene with his brother, John Maxton had raged out of the house and never returned. Till now.

Not for the first time did Tewin wonder if he were doing the right thing as he tugged the corroded old bell pull on the door. For nearly five years now he had gone between the brothers, trying to reconcile them. Anne had died, Robert was living alone in this decaying mansion and John, a sick man, was living alone in a distant town. It made sense to bring them together. But would it work?

Tewin was a regular visitor at the Hall and on each occasion noticed how much it had deteriorated since his last visit. The squire was not only an old man, but an easy-going one, scarcely seeming to notice that the servants did less and less. The large and beautiful entrance hall was in almost total darkness for the shutters were drawn, so that the place smelled dank and heavy.

But, for once, Tewin barely noticed the forlorn condition of the place; he was too much on edge wondering how the looming interview would go.

To his astonishment, the brothers met almost as casually as though they had parted company the night before. As they entered the drawing room, Robert Maxton walked slowly to meet them. He, too, was a tall man and age had

treated him kinder than his brother so that he towered over him.

But there was one moment in the conversation that followed when it seemed that the newfound friendship would shatter—a moment which Tewin was to carry with him for the rest of his life. It came about an hour after they had first entered the room. Tea had been brought in by a pert young girl and the room had seemed almost homelike. Robert leaned forward and put his hand on his brother's knee. "Anne would have liked. . . ."

He never finished the sentence. John's whole body shook with a rage that belied his years, but he spoke quietly enough. "If I am to stay here, let us never mention her name again."

There was a moment's pregnant silence and then Robert Maxton opened his hands in a gesture of resignation.

Tewin made only two more visits to the Hall. The first was on the occasion of his regular Christmas visit, usually, a somewhat gloomy, even macabre entertainment with himself and his host sitting solemnly in the freezing dining room, picking at cold food. But on this occasion some of the old gaiety seemed to have come back.

He noticed that the Hall seemed cleaner, tidier. John, ever the more forceful of the two, had obviously made his presence felt.

They dined, not in the funereal dining room, but in a small, cozy study. Even the food had improved, Tewin noticed with wonder, and congratulated himself on his experiment. It had taken many weary months as go-between to bring these two obstinate old men together.

Robert Maxton had been lonely for too many years: first Anne dying, then the daughter. She would have been about 30 now, Tewin thought. She would probably have had a family—a family to bring back life into this decaying home. For the decay had been arrested, not cured. He shivered slightly, and drank some more wine and his laughter was rather forced.

His second visit was two months after the first. John Maxton was dying and he had come to do what he could. It was little enough. The old man was dying as he had lived—sardonically, fiercely independent. But he welcomed Tewin, as a friend if not as a priest, and the two talked casually and easily.

Tewin was preparing to leave when Maxton, with sudden

energy, pulled himself upright in the bed and looked at the clergyman with his eagle's glance.

"I want you to promise me something. I want you to promise that I'll be buried in the churchyard and *not* in the family vault.

Tewin was appalled. Generation after generation of the Maxtons had been interred in the great vault just inside the churchyard gate. He said as much and his reply roused the old man to something near fury.

Then, in a grinding voice, he said "If, when I am dead, you dare to bury me in the same vault as that accursed woman, the living as well as the dead shall hear of me."

Deeply troubled, Tewin went downstairs to where Robert was waiting. The squire seemed as though the life had gone from him. Regarding him, Tewin found it impossible to pass on that last terrible request of his brother's. They talked desultorily for a while and then, full of a profound misgiving, Tewin left.

John Maxton died the following day and, according to the custom of the Maxton family, he was buried in the vault, his coffin being placed next to the coffins of his sister-in-law and niece. Tewin, as rector of the parish, officiated at the ceremony. He did not quite know what he expected, but it was with a feeling of great relief that he watched the great slab of the vault being lowered into place.

The ceremony had passed decorously. There had been few present—very few considering that the Maxtons had lived in this part of Lincolnshire for centuries. But Robert and John Maxton had outlived all their contemporaries and Robert now was the very last of the line. The mourners consisted of the servants from the Hall and a handful of villagers come to gaze upon the old semi-recluse and to whisper tales of a forty-year-old scandal—that was all.

The rectory was at some distance from the church, which stood between it and the Maxton vault. Tewin rarely had cause to go near the vault and it was therefore some days before he was aware of anything unusual. The first intimation he had was from an elderly village woman, a notorious gossip, who had for some days been trying to extract from him the story of the supposed affair between John and Anne Maxton. He snubbed her firmly, but not before she had time to mutter darkly that queer things were happening in the Maxton vault.

Rather more serious was the remark made by the verger,

a man of immense good sense upon whom Tewin was accustomed to rely. According to the verger people living in a cottage near the vault were frightened to leave their house at night. Terrible noises were coming from the vault; could the rector do something about it?

Reluctantly, Tewin visited the cottagers. He knew them well—a decent, hard-working farm laborer and his wife. The man was inclined to be sheepish, but insisted that their nights were made hideous by the sounds coming from the vault.

What kind of sounds? Violent sounds—the sounds of fighting—of anger.

Tewin kept the matter to himself, but a few days later a small deputation waited on him. It was led by the farm laborer and included other people living near the churchyard. There was no doubting their anxiety—the genuine fear which overcame the traditional reserve and fear of being ridiculed which normally characterized the villagers. Something was in that vault—was it—perhaps—a live man? Could the unthinkable have happened and a man become trapped there?

Vividly, the words of John Maxton came back to the rector—"the living as well as the dead shall hear of me." He promised to look into the matter and, as soon as they had left, he went straight to the squire.

Robert Maxton obviously had little time left to him. The brief rejuvenation brought about by the return of his brother had passed, leaving him a shambling mumbling old man. With infinite reluctance, Tewin broke the news to him—hinting, not stating—but urging that the vault should be inspected. Maxton seemed barely to understand but at last Tewin received the necessary permission.

Other, official, permission was required and it was not until the late afternoon of the following day that a small group of people stood while the heavy slab to the vault was raised. Tewin descended first, followed by Maxton and the verger.

A little over ten days before, Tewin had stood in the same place while the heavy oak coffin of John Maxton had been placed on the marble shelf immediately next to that of his niece. Beyond the young girl's coffin had been that of her mother.

The marble shelf was empty. The coffins of mother and daughter lay in the farthest corner of the vault—the word

"cowering" came into Tewin's mind. In the center of the vault, erect and facing them, was the coffin of John Maxton.

The sight broke through even the squire's dulled mind. He collapsed and was carried out, more dead than alive.

Tewin stood by while the coffins were replaced. To the verger's anxious questions he merely replied that there must have been some kind of explosion. As much to give credence to the theory as in any real hope that it would have any effect, he ordered that ventilators should be constructed in the outer wall of the vault.

Nothing untoward happened during the two days that the work occupied and the vault was again closed to await its next occupant. And on the night that it was closed, the sounds of violent struggle were again heard. Once more, it was opened to disclose that the three most recent coffins were displaced.

Finally, Tewin exceeded his authority as a vicar. There was no sense to be had from Robert Maxton and, on his own initiative, Tewin ordered that a brick wall should be built down the center of the vault, dividing it into two. When it was completed, the coffins of mother and daughter were placed in the larger section, while that of John Maxton was placed by itself.

"Thereafter," the Reverend John Tewin reported to his bishop, "there were no more disturbances." A very short while afterwards, the vault had to be opened for the burial of Robert Maxton. All was in decorous order. Tewin was faced with a dilemma. Upon which side of the wall should Robert's coffin be placed?

At last, though reluctantly, he decided that it should be placed with the majority of his family, including his wife and child. John Maxton lay alone.

Such was the report which Tewin submitted to his church officials. Scrupulously, he gave all the details. Scrupulously, he refrained from giving his own opinion: except to remark that it was common Christian practice to pray that the dead should rest in peace which implied that, sometimes, they did not.

THE SPECTRE OF GIBRALTAR

Rearing out of the sea like some monstrous gray beast, its precipitous front facing Africa, its sloping back to Europe, there is small wonder that legends have long enshrouded the Rock of Gibraltar. The Greeks thought of it as one of the Pillars of Hercules, gateway to the mysterious lands of the Western Ocean, while the Arabs looked upon it as the stronghold of a legendary hero, Tarik—and called it Jebel Tarik.

Even the prosaic 20th century maintains the legend, half laughingly, of the Barbary Apes. Half laughingly, perhaps—but taking it with sufficient seriousness for a British government department to lay down a scale of rations for the apes just in case, perhaps, that when the apes leave the British might, too.

Then less than a century ago, a new story was added to the ancient epic of Gibraltar—a story which, unlike many of the others, was the subject of serious and official investigation. At that time the 46th Regiment was stationed upon the Rock. In the Rock would, perhaps, be a better word.

Generations after generations of soldiers, of scores of nationalities and over many centuries had hacked and carved at the soft, gray rock, creating a bewildering series of tunnels and chambers. Even with modern electric lighting the deeper cavities are unsettling. In the 19th century the available lighting merely intensified the gloom of scores of recesses. Men did not willingly walk alone in the heart of the Rock.

Then one summer a persistent rumor swept through the regiment that the ghost of a woman haunted the Rock.

Stories of apparitions, some of them quite well attested, were fairly common. There was the well-known case of the sentry at Europa Point who challenged a figure apparently standing in mid-air; later investigations showed that the cliff had crumbled at this point two centuries earlier, but that prior to that there had been a camp just where the figure was standing.

That legend had entered the history of Gibraltar with

the label "not proven." The sentry had been a veteran soldier well aware that to turn out the guard for an illusion would bring down on him not merely official displeasure, but the execrations of his comrades. He had insisted that he had seen a figure, and described it quite clearly—a soldier in an old-fashioned uniform bearing an enormously long rifle. His private opinion was that the figure, too, was a sentry. But he had been alone and by the time the guard had turned out, there had been nothing to see.

The ghost of the woman, however, had been seen over many days by a variety of people. A cook, carrying a cauldron of hot soup, had been startled out of his life as it seemed to materialize out of the rock before him. He bore scald marks on his foot to witness to the reality he, at least, was convinced he had seen.

Another sentry had spotted her walking past one of the batteries but, assuming that it was merely a local woman probably on some assignment with one of his comrades, had discreetly ignored it.

After ten days, there was sufficient objective evidence to be brought to official notice. There was disagreement as to her age and appearance. Some stated that she was a young woman, others made her elderly. On some occasions she was seen clearly enough for men to hazard a guess at her clothing—some sort of robe or long shawl was the general opinion.

But though the men might disagree about her appearance they were unanimous in one matter. The woman was looking for something or someone. None saw her face clearly, but each was aware of a curious intensity of glance—an intensity followed invariably by a sense of disappointment. The cook, particularly, swore to that. He had met her in a comparatively brightly lit passage and was convinced that she was on the point of speaking to him.

It was the shock of this, not her appearance, that had made him drop the cauldron . . . and confined him to the hospital for the next fortnight.

It was in the hospital that the mystery was ultimately unraveled. Hitherto, the ghost had been reported as walking only through the tunnels and caverns of the Rock and, occasionally, on the steep outer slopes. Now, as though it had narrowed down the area of search it appeared more and more frequently in the vicinity of the hospital—a fact which considerably unnerved the unfortunate cook.

But it was not the cook the ghost was seeking. That was made evident to the commanding officer late in September when the chaplain called upon him for a private interview. What the chaplain had to say determined Captain Emmett to make a semi-official visit to one of the patients—a certain Private Watson, who had told an extraordinary story to the chaplain.

There was another man involved, a patient in the same ward as Watson and, determined that there should be no collusion, Captain Emmett arranged that Watson should be interviewed in a private room. Watson was cautioned to tell the exact truth, as the matter was to form the subject of an official report. Watson accepted the warning and told his story.

The previous night he had been lying awake in the ward, unable to sleep although it was past eleven o'clock. A man was dying in one of the beds and the lights and activity around him had disturbed Watson. Additionally, over the past two or three nights, at about the same time, he had heard footsteps moving up and down the ward, apparently going from bed to bed. He had been in the hospital for over a month and so had heard nothing about the rumors of a ghost at large.

He insisted upon that fact, for he had been puzzled and slightly irritated by the footsteps, but nothing more. The ward was usually dark and he assumed that it was some orderly on his rounds.

Lying in bed next to him was a certain Corporal McQueen. On the previous night, Watson deposed, he had turned on his side, intending to address a remark to McQueen whom he thought he heard stirring. Somewhat to his surprise, he thought he saw McQueen sitting at the foot of his bed. Gradually, however, as his eyes became accustomed to the dim lighting, he saw that McQueen was obviously asleep.

But the figure at the foot of the bed remained sitting absolutely still. Even at this stage, Watson was not alarmed. The situation was curious, no more. At last he called out to McQueen, saying that someone was sitting on his bed. McQueen woke, looked around and at the same moment Watson saw the figure rise, glide to the head of the bed and, bending over McQueen, seemed to be speaking to him.

It was only then that Watson sensed that he was witnessing something paranormal and, at the same moment, fear struck him. He pulled the covers over his head and did not

dare look out again for another half an hour. When he did at last have the courage to stick his head out of the blankets it was to see McQueen, sitting bolt upright and looking straight ahead. Watson called to him, but McQueen merely told him to be silent and go to sleep.

That ended Watson's testimony and shortly afterwards McQueen was brought into the interview room. He, too, was warned that his evidence would be incorporated in an official report. He was undisturbed and seemed, to the chaplain and the officer, to be far away. He spoke clearly and distinctly, but as though he were passing on unimportant information while his mind was busied with other, more momentous affairs.

Yes, Private Watson had awakened him the previous night—some time about midnight—saying that a figure was sitting on the foot of the bed. There was sufficient light for McQueen to see that the figure was not one of the other patients and, as it approached him he saw how it was dressed. His description resolved the conflicting rumors. The figure was wearing neither robe nor long shawl but a shroud. It resembled a long gown of flannel edged with black tape and with bows of the same tape at wrists and neck. He was able to be so precise in his description because he had last seen that shroud, in real life, when he had helped to place the woman in her coffin.

He knew who she was, then? Apparently, for the figure leaned over him and said, "I am the spirit of Mary Madden and I bespeak your attention." But he had recognized her in any case.

Mary Madden was the wife of one of his comrades. She and McQueen had been very close friends. She had died about a year previously.

The questioning went on, gentler now but still insistent. Did he recognize the face and voice.

Not "recognize" in the normal sense. She did not speak at all, not so that any other person could hear. The voice seemed to sing through his head. But he had known it was she.

But *how* had he known? How could he be certain?

For the first time McQueen appeared distressed but at last, in answer to the questioning replied, "She gave me definite proof for she told me of something that had taken place between us that no other person in the world could possibly have known about."

Steadily, McQueen declined to say what had taken place between them and his questioners honored his reticence and refrained from probing. There was no doubt whatsoever that McQueen was utterly certain that the being that leaned over him was the spirit of his dead friend, Mary Madden.

Had she come for any purpose? Did she give him a specific message.

McQueen was prepared to answer that, but the answer was itself mystifying. He was to warn her husband that he must desist in some course he was engaged upon, or he would come to disaster.

And that, he said, completed the visitation. He promised that he would write to her husband and the figure stated that it would not again trouble the hospital nor the vicinity. She had found the person she had been seeking and was content.

McQueen watched her drift back across the room to the fireplace. She seemed to grope above it and then turned around to face him, gradually dissolving into the shadows of night. Shortly afterwards Watson had spoken to him, but he had ignored him and remained awake for the rest of the night. And on that very morning he had written to Mary Madden's husband, conveying the warning that she had given him.

Three months afterwards it happened that Captain Emmet and Corporal McQueen were on the same boat bound for England. Emmet took the opportunity to question McQueen again in a more informal atmosphere, but not by the smallest detail did McQueen swerve from his story.

He could give no explanation as to why his visitant had had so much trouble in finding him, for he still did not know what evil course her husband was engaged upon, or whether the warning had made him change his ways.

The facts were as he deposed them; the explanation must be left to others.

BIRD OF DEATH

The wartime blackout was already smothering London as Lieutenant James Morgan paid off the taxi and peered around him. For the hundredth time he found himself won-

dering whether the inconvenience and sheer danger caused by the blackout had any compensation in additional security from air raids. He doubted it very much, as he stumbled and nearly fell over the edge of the pavement.

At the best of times Soho was a maze, but in this impenetrable darkness, with nothing to give scale or direction, it was good luck alone that brought a traveler to his destination. He had intended to arrive at midday, discharge this tedious business with the family lawyer, and then be well out of London before nightfall.

However, a series of missed connections had landed him in London at eight o'clock of a November night in 1940. To make matters worse, he was in an unfamiliar part of London. For years, he had been visiting the lawyer in the old man's chambers in the Temple, but when the original office was destroyed by a bomb, the firm found accommodation in Soho—and Morgan had to track down a totally unknown house in nearly total darkness.

Fortunately, the house he was seeking still had its number, a rarity in this part of the city, and with a feeling of profound relief he pushed the heavy old door open.

Inside, the long dismal hall was lit by a low powered bulb whose light was trapped by the folds of the blackout curtain that hung in front of the door. Ahead, a wide and handsome staircase led up to the next floor.

Despite the miserable lighting, it was clear that this house had once seen better days. Morgan guessed that it was at least two centuries old—Georgian architecture at its best—but thick brown paint had been daubed all over the delicate woodwork, obscuring the beautiful workmanship.

Halfway up the stairs he noticed a large mural. Age and dirt and bad lighting, had made it extremely difficult to make out details. It seemed to be the picture of a house of about the same period as the one he was in. A man and woman were standing in the doorway and in the top right-hand corner was what appeared to be a coat of arms. Old Mansell would probably know what it was, he thought, and walked on up the stairs.

Mansell, the lawyer greeted Morgan affectionately. Ever since the young officer could remember "Old Mansell" had been the family lawyer, advising, hinting, gently guiding. Suddenly, he was looking his age, shattered by the experience of seeing the home he had built up over many years destroyed in one night of fire. Mansell's chambers in

the Temple had been more than an office—it had been his home, for he had never married.

Over a glass of brandy, Mansell answered Morgan's question about the mural. Yes, it represented this house about a year or so after it was built for the man and woman in the picture. It was, in fact, still the property of the family though none of them had lived in it for more than fifty years.

Their legal business was a tedious and lengthy matter and ten o'clock was striking when they had finished. Morgan got wearily to his feet. Ahead of him lay the task of finding a hotel—at this time of night and in the blackout. Mansell shook his head dubiously. It was an impossible task, he said, unless one had booked days in advance. The best thing would be for the young man to stay the night.

The house had seemed almost derelict, but, the lawyer explained, he himself slept in a room further down the passage and, though there were no other furnished rooms in the place, there was a huge fourposter in a room on the floor above. He could provide blankets and, though it would be far from ideal, it was at least better than tramping about London at night.

Gratefully Morgan accepted and the two of them made their way up to the second floor. The room was scarcely welcoming. Uncarpeted, covered with the same dingy brown paint, the ubiquitous blackout curtain hanging at the window like a great shadow—but it was shelter for the night.

The bed proved better than he had hoped for. Obviously, it had been brought into the room in pieces and assembled there. It could only be removed after it was dismantled, which probably explained why it remained. There was one other piece of furniture—an enormous couch along the wall opposite the window.

The fabric with which it was covered, patterned with bold abstract shapes, seemed in curiously good condition compared with the rest of the room. Someone must recently have recovered it, he thought, and turned his attention to the bed.

That, too, seemed to have been restored, for in place of the old-fashioned rope courses that made up the spring was substituted a reasonably comfortable modern spring with a lumpy, but serviceable, mattress upon it. Thankfully, he sank down upon it.

Five minutes later Morgan was in bed, snuggled down

beneath a motley layer of blankets and coats, topped off with his own heavy greatcoat. Sleep should have come to him immediately, considering the day he had had, but for nearly an hour he lay on his back, looking up at the divisible canopy of the bed, listening to the cracked chimes from the clock in Mansell's study.

The room smelled both damp and oppressive, for the heavy blackout curtain blocked off every movement of air. On an impulse he arose and, feeling his way cautiously across the room, tore the ugly thing down so that it lay in a heavy fold on the left hand side of the window. Immediately the room was flooded with light.

For some minutes he stood at the window, gazing at an enormous moon. The night was still and calm, even the street below lay quiet in the brilliant moonlight. At last he returned to bed and, this time, fell asleep almost immediately.

The room was still flooded with moonlight when he awoke suddenly sometime later. Some irregularity had penetrated to his subconscious, bringing him from the depths of sleep to sudden, tense wakefulness.

He was again lying on his back, staring up at the dimly visible underside of the canopy. The irregularity had been a sound, something like fluttering of wings, and it had come from the left—from the vicinity of the sofa.

Cautiously, he turned his head. Nothing had changed. The blackout curtain still lay on the sofa and . . .

The blackout curtain. It shouldn't be on the sofa. He turned his head to the right and saw the curtain exactly where he had left it, hanging in a great black fold on the left hand side of the window.

The next moment he was fighting for his life. . . .

He had turned his head to look again at the sofa, half rising in the bed as he did so. As he looked, it seemed to him that the black object on the sofa rose into the air. More and more of it curled upwards, looking at first like a column of black smoke and then rapidly resolving itself into an object.

It was an immense, black bird, more than half as tall as a man, the spread and beat of whose wings seemed to fill even this large room. Without knowing what he was doing Morgan found himself out of bed and in the center of the room. The ghastly creature cut off his retreat through the door. Behind him was the window, through which the moon

poured its light upon the inky black feathers. There was no escape forward, or behind.

The creature came at him, half-strutting upon its horny legs, half fluttering. It leaped into the air like a fighting cock, bringing its cruel claws down in a stabbing sweep.

Morgan leaped back and the creature again lunged, pecking at him with its huge iron beak.

But there was no further retreat for his back was against the wall. In fear and desperation he realized that there was only one way out—through the door. If, perhaps, he could get to the bed and grab his greatcoat it might be possible to smother his assailant. Screwing up his courage, he dashed for the bed and desperately tugged the coat off, picking it up as a shield.

And it was then that he realized that the bird, too, had retreated as he came forward. Emboldened, escape forgotten as the lust for survival overtook him, he charged.

But no matter how swift or violent his charge, the bird remained always a hand's breadth beyond. And though it attacked in return, with a spine-chilling ferocity, it never actually touched him. He felt the wind of its passing; again and again he expected the claws to fasten into his flesh—but they seemed to pass through.

And at last he had the creature cornered, back where it had come from—the sofa. He raised his coat high in the air and brought it down on the bird. For a moment it seemed as though there were a turbulence beneath it, and then the coat went slack and quiet.

Morgan whipped it away and looked unbelievably at the sofa. The black cloud had almost gone, retreating into one of the bizarre abstract black patterns on the sofa. He was still looking, dazed, when the door opened and old Mansell put his head in the room.

Later, over a large glass of brandy, Morgan told his story. The lawyer shrugged hopelessly and looked apologetic. "I heard some such tale when I took the lease, but it doesn't do to pay much regard to these things. I would never have dreamed of offering you that room if—"

Mansell told him the little that he knew. It was true that the house had not been occupied by the family that built it for more than fifty years. But throughout those years had persisted the legend of the bird—the same bird which appeared on the mural on the staircase and which Morgan had thought was a coat-of-arms. It was said that its ap-

pearance foretold a death in the house, but never before had it been known to attack.

It must have been decades since anyone last slept in that room, or even entered it after dark. It was unfortunate that Morgan should have been the first.

Morgan left early the following morning and two days later was back at sea. The affair had almost passed out of his memory through the pressure of war when, some three months later, his ship received a delivery of mail. Among the many letters waiting for him was one from an unknown firm of solicitors, dated a few days after he had seen Mansell. The old man was dead, killed by the bomb that had reduced the house to a pile of rubble, destroying everything in it. He had named Morgan as his heir.

Morgan found that his hands were trembling. So the bird had returned to foretell death, after all. The death of Mansell . . . and the death of the house.

THE CURSE OF THE CHINESE MAGICIAN

It has been said that one should never look a gift horse in the mouth but if an Englishman had looked more deeply into a gift from a Chinese he would have killed himself.

It has also been said that those who learn Chinese must first go mad and it follows from this that the people of the Han are almost impossible for foreigners to understand. This is certainly so for their neighbors, the Indians, and doubly so for Europeans. And it was this ignorance of the yellow race's tortuous psychology that led one Englishman to accept a gift that was meant to be his bane.

Colonel Sir William Belford, Military Attaché of the British Embassy in Peking, always believed that he understood and got on well with the Chinese. Of course, it helped that he was a soldier in the service of a Queen, for the Empress Tzui Hsui certainly felt some sort of remote kinship with Victoria.

In fact, the People of the Seas, as the English were sometimes called, were one of the few races for whom the Chinese of the last century had any respect.

The respect was minimal, but it was better than the out-

right contempt held for "barbarian" states, whose rulers were actually elected by the people. For the ambassadors of American and France were frequently humiliated in the court of the aging Empress.

Added to this, the Chinese allowed that the insular, aristocratic, and ancient society that held sway in Britain gave that fortunate race some reason to think themselves near-civilized. What the Chinese never breathed in front of any "foreign devil" was any mention of their venomous hatred of the people who had humiliated China, had degraded her, taken her pride, and were foremost among the instigators and victors of the Opium Wars.

Respect was paid to the People of the Seas for they were deemed worth it, but every Chinese swore before his ancestors (the most binding oath possible), that his race would be avenged on the upstart "barbarians."

This fierce hatred was so well camouflaged, concealed beneath the smooth manner of protocol and custom, that none in the British Embassy, least of all Colonel Belford ever realized its existence. The sudden, unbelievable passions of the violently anti-European Boxer Uprising took them by surprise. After its eventual suppression, seemingly unmindful of the Imperial Court's clandestine support for the rebels, Colonel Belford and his colleagues continued to treat the high ranking Chinese officials with whom they dealt exactly as before.

There was good reason for this apparent trust. China lay helpless at the feet of the Western conquerors and dared offer no insults or injury to any of their representatives. So who need fear a man in chains?

It was for this reason, undoubtedly, that the bitter-minded denizens of the Imperial Court took the only weapon left to them—and used it.

Superstition and the Empress were the twin rulers of Imperial China and, as the one had failed them, the defeated Chinese turned to the other. At that time no yellow man dared make any decision without consulting an astrologer or magician; just as today none will say nor do anything without first applying himself to the thoughts of Chairman Mao; the habit of generations runs deep.

Among these magicians there existed a definite hierarchy, much as the sage pundits of Harley Street have their pecking order; and the doyen of them all was magician to the Empress herself. If it hadn't been for this man's lapse from

his normal decorum, a brief moment when his polite mask-face slipped, Colonel Belford might never have suspected anything. For, as Belford passed by him, on his way to a farewell audience with the Empress, the court magician suddenly laughed.

"I hope, honored sir," he said, "you will remember your time with us for the rest of your life. And may you live to tell your grandchildren the tale."

Ordinarily, such flowery sentiments would have meant no more than "Goodbye—nice to have known you." But the man's expression and his laugh belied such an innocent meaning that Belford stopped and, in his abrupt European way, asked him direct what he meant. At that time he suspected some subtle form of murder was to be directed at him, for he knew the Chinese were past masters at it. The magician, however, protested his meaning was the obvious one and, with his usual bland expression, bowed and withdrew.

His audience with the Empress over, the Colonel, thinking uneasily of the myriad forms of murder he was vulnerable to, made his rounds of the European embassies saying farewells as he went. It was not until he returned home that he had direct cause to fear.

In the courtyard of his house was a group of Chinese peasants sitting around in an expectant circle. They had bought a number of presents from various officials and were merely waiting till he should come to claim them. These presents, when revealed, alarmed the Colonel. He was sure one of them was poisoned, or booby trapped, in some subtle way—but which one? He was quite right, one of them *was* a sort of booby trap, but not in the way he thought.

Belford knew some of the murderous tricks China's professional assassins had evolved over millennia. One particularly unpleasant method was finely chopped bamboo mixed with food. Once swallowed, the tiny shards ripped and tore the intestines, to that the victim died in slow agony.

Another, fiendish in its subtlety, was a specially honed knife with a blade so slim that only the tiniest scratch marked the outer wound—but this killed by causing severe internal bleeding, which could never be cured. The victim was usually unaware of the death blow, till he collapsed from a fatal loss of blood.

Mindful of such little surprises, Belford sorted through the pile, destroying everything that could even remotely

hold danger. Goblets which might contain hidden compartments housing poison to be released by the pressure of liquid after the twentieth time of filling; bolts of cloth which might possibly be impregnated with some slow nerve poison; even a beautiful engraved sword. It all went. One thing, however, Belford kept. This was a dish, so beautifully enameled, so brilliantly colored, and made of such fine porcelain that he could not bear to smash it.

To be sure he went to the trouble of soaking it in a strong soda solution, just in case it had been coated with a thin toxic layer, but he had acted as the court magician must have known he would. It was the dish—and nothing else—that was to carry the revenge of ancient China.

Belford, in common with most Europeans of the period, had never troubled to learn Chinese and this was the fateful weakness. For the characters, emblazoned in gold around the edge, were the outward signs of inward evil. Their meaning would have been plain to any scholar he would have shown it to and they would have told him that the dish's owner was cursed—but cursed in a different, cruel way.

The malice laid a doom upon him and, because to the Chinese the family was more important than the individual, even more upon his children and their children's children. The inscription, later translated by a friend of his last surviving granddaughter, cursed Belford's health, bound his children to sterility, or to an early death if already parents, and placed a bane upon the family's fortune. The recipient himself was to live to see his sons die childless or young and their fortune vanish with them.

Fortunately for his peace of mind, Colonel Belford knew nothing of this and proudly exhibited his beautiful dish to all his friends when he returned to England. And it was such a perfect example of classical Chinese porcelain that several museums offered to buy it. It was not until the 1930s that the West realized that the secrets of producing China's superb pottery had not died with the Ming emperors.

Far from being a priceless, centuries-old antique, as they undoubtedly supposed, the dish could have been made at almost anytime since the Ming period. In fact, it must have been made just a few months of Colonel Belford's receiving it.

Proud of his sole remaining curio, Belford habitually kept it prominently displayed in his living room where it posed

a temptation to every thief in London; and it would have been better for the Colonel if it had, indeed, been stolen. As it was, the baneful object remained—to grace his room and curse his life.

It is, of course, impossible to say when the curse began to take effect, because all that subsequently happened can be put down to the vicissitudes of life, equally as much as to the fateful scheme of the xenophobic Chinese magician.

Within a year of retiring to England, Belford developed an obscure and painful disease of the stomach. The Institute of Tropical Medicine in London, while professing as much interest in his complaint as museum curators did in his dish, was equally ignorant of its origins.

As his condition made him a social embarrassment, Belford was forced to spend more and more time by himself, and not surprisingly grew querulous and vindictive. It was at this time that the housebound invalid decided to invest his money in one of the most ill-fated ventures of capitalist history. He sank most of his money into Russian railways.

At the time it looked an excellent investment, for extra capital was needed to extend the line over the empty Steppes, and the interest rate was good. How could he have known that the revolution of 1917 would remove the bulk of his fortunes as it would remove the freedom of 200,000 Russians?

As the years rolled on, the aging Colonel clung resentfully to life. He looked old and behaved like a curmudgeon, scarcely changing his normal manner when his wife died, suddenly, of a brain tumor. His interest, however, in his sons' careers remained unabated—if disguised. His youngest son, Ronald, seemed destined for a higher rank than his father had ever attained in their mutual profession. So, it came as a considerable shock when the Colonel learned that Captain Ronald Belford had fallen in battle somewhere on India's northwest frontier. His childless widow lived for a time with her father-in-law, but moved away shortly and eventually married again.

Now that an Afghan bullet, fired by a kill-crazy hillman, had deprived him of his most promising son, the old man's pride was enshrined in the person of his eldest. This was Captain William Belford, slower rising than his brilliant brother, but, in fact, much more stable—and it was this very stability that led, in the end, to his death. His doom was scant years away.

When the opening shots of the First World War were exchanged one of the first victims in the British army was a young, totally obscure lieutenant. His death, while it made no difference at all to the outcome of the action in which he fell, plunged the Belford family into gloom once more. For the lad was the young husband of Belford's only daughter, and she remained sunk in a sorrow so deep that she never uttered a word for three months. At last when she rejoined the society of her kin, she was a changed person in mind as well as body.

The Chinese curse must have lain heavily on the Belford family for that girl produced no children and, at the death of her second husband in the terrible carnage of the Somme, the luckless double widow took her own life. Her father, now helpless in his chair, his life extended by the inability of his body to wear itself out, began to feel himself cursed. He mentioned it several times to the younger William and once, in the presence of his granddaughter, referred to the ubiquitous magician who had worried him all those years before.

The girl, aged 15 and intelligent, was fascinated by the old man's story for to her, fanciful as are the young, the great Chinese vessel had always seemed repellent. She was never able in later life to exactly explain this curious repulsion, but to her the brittle, stick-like Chinese characters gilded and gleaming always seemed to have something to do with it.

She referred to them as having an "oily and poisonous" gleam, and the shadowed red of the inlay, typical of Chinese work, sometimes haunted her dreams, she claimed.

Her father, by then a lieutenant colonel, always laughed whenever she taxed him with the overheard conversation. Once he even remarked that, if all else failed and the family was broke, the dish might come in handy to repair the fortunes. In actuality, the dish won not a penny for its last owner, but brought bankruptcy, ruin and disgrace upon her.

The probable value of the great vessel received added importance after the Bolshevik revolution of 1917 and after the Christian socialist Kerensky government had been overthrown. For with the nationalization of the Russian railways, the Belford family lost every cent they owned. Life to Colonel Belford, trapped in his painwrecked body, was now as dreary as the life of a slave in the Siberian salt mines.

One bright ray of hope still shone for him—that was the existence of his last son, the other Colonel Belford.

Had the malicious minds at China's Imperial Court been able to see the pitiful condition their victim had been reduced to 20 years after they might possibly have felt remorse. As a man, Belford thought he had been a friend, but as a soldier, representative of the nation that had first humbled old China, he had been an enemy for eternity.

There was but one more blow awaiting the tortured old soldier, and after that, release. Had he known about it, it is possible he might even have looked forward to his passage out of this troubled world. The blow fell in July, 1918. Lieutenant Colonel Belford's regiment reeled before a sudden frantic attack. Outnumbered, surprised, Belford's exhausted men fought back. Dizzy with fatigue and weary after four years of war they were no match for the erupting, desperate flood of men in field gray. The men in khaki began to give; by ones and twos they slipped away from the firing line, nearly dying of the urge to live. Belford junior, stolid and stable, stood up, rallied his men and led them in a bayonet charge. He kept them at it for two hours—and was struck down thirty minutes before reinforcements arrived.

A posthumous Victoria Cross was sent to the address that housed the gallant officer's aged father—but the old man never saw it. He died a few weeks after he knew that his sole living descendant was a woman. His family had been a military one for generations and, with the passing of his last son, its proud record ended with him.

Thus had the curse been borne out in every detail. Belford had lived, with ruined health, to see his children all die before him, and his only grandchild destitute. As for her, she was never free of a baneful influence, she never forgot the suspicions attached to the Chinese relic which she had, perforce to keep. She had never liked it as a child—and she hated it as an adult—but she always kept it with her.

As an orphan she and her mother had lived with her maternal grandparents and the dish survived, because the mother insisted on reserving its value for the time when her child should need it. But the curse did not spare even the third generation. A marriage entered into gladly, collapsed when her only child was stillborn. It was almost as if the

husband blamed her personally for the lack of children after learning that she could have no more.

Financial disaster stalked her in the years between the wars until the inevitable charge of bankruptcy loomed over her. At the outbreak of the Second World War she was finally forced to contemplate selling her last family heirloom; the Chinese dish. At that time prices for foreign curios, particularly fragile ones, were at a low ebb. Though transportable, realizable, gold ornaments fetched a high price, she discovered that her "priceless" relic had a very low value indeed.

It was at this time that she was curious enough about the hateful object to go to the trouble of having the strange, twisted characters translated. When she knew what those glittering pictographs really meant she sat down before it aghast and incredulous. In those dreary days of 1941, when blackout London was nightly riven by bombs and aerial mines, there seemed to her nothing more cruel and senseless than this single, evil object.

Selling it was too good, she thought then, and had to restrain herself from taking a hammer and shattering that peerless porcelain. Perhaps she didn't because the solution to her problem was so poetically just. Selling the dish, the vessel which had brought the curse on her and hers, would help recoup some of the losses. With that thought in mind she let it be; but that dish was meant to exact vengeance not grant happiness.

A few weeks later, before she had really organized a sale, a mass bombing raid occurred and among the houses smashed into burning rubble was the one which contained the Chinese dish. Bomb damage has curious effects. Blast can pulverize a wooden sideboard yet leave a glass vessel untouched.

In this explosion, little of the house was actually damaged. The bomb had fallen next door and the blast, ripping upwards, demolished the immediate target and shook the neighbor's outer wall, peeling it away from the rest of the house. It was on this wall that the dish had hung from a stout iron chain.

From the street below, Colonel Belford's granddaughter was able to look up and see every item of her furniture intact and open to the air. She realized her last chance to avoid bankruptcy had gone shattered like the priceless dish itself under its load of rubble.

She was destitute, she was alone—and yet, she felt a lightness of heart. With the dish destroyed she could at last live a life free of its corrosive influence.

THE HANDS OF GEORGE AUBERT

Eighty years ago Paris was a city of music. From the plush and gilt of the Opera, through the boulevard theaters that rang to the gay harmonies of Offenbach, to the smoky bistros where the *chanteuses* sang out their litanies of betrayed women and unrequited love. . . . This was the great period of Paris, that city of light, the aftermath of the Franco-Prussian War, when the bloody rising of the Commune had followed the occupation by the Prussians, and had left only bitter memories. The agony of 1914-18 still lay in the future, for Paris was truly the capital of gaiety.

But there was little gaiety in the life of George Aubert. The son of a peasant family in Provence, he had come to Paris as a very young man to seek his fortune. To seek—but not to find.

For George had artistic leanings, but no skill. In the city of Degas and Toulouse-Lautrec he had aspired to be a painter, but the masters to whom he applied had laughed him out of their studios when he showed his clumsy daubs. He then tried sculpture.

Yet, strive as he might, clay in his hands remained a shapeless dough. He could not strike stone with chisel without either blunting the chisel, splitting the stone, or cutting himself. He was, in fact, an artistic failure.

Knowing no working skills, he had sunk to the level of a common laborer—worse off even than his humble parents on their small holding in the south. At least they lived in the sunlight and open air, while he was condemned to a life in the most vile slums of Paris.

There was only one thing in life of which he was proud, and these were his long, delicate hands. Even though forced to do manual work, George still managed to keep his hands soft and flexible. From his miserable wage, he still managed to squeeze a few *sous* for hand-creams and lotions. His hands were a fetish—all that remained of his once lofty ambitions.

It was George's hands that had first inspired his thoughts of being an artist. The country girls of his youth had admired their softness, their deceptive fragility—for George's hands were, in fact, extremely strong, with long, beautifully shaped fingers. Such hands, it was felt, were suited to some great creative task, rather than rough toil.

But at the age of 40, George had still found no use to which his hands could be put—other than to fetch and carry to earn him a meager living. His hands, he felt, were separate entities rather than simply a part of his otherwise undistinguished body. If George Aubert had a god—or rather gods—they were his hands.

One night he dropped in at a cafe near his squalid lodgings. He had received his weekly wage and had been given, in addition, a large tip by a wealthy tourist at the Gare du Nord. For once, he decided, he would give himself a treat.

After a few glasses of cheap cognac, to which he was not accustomed, George became pleasantly drunk. One of the loose women of the quarter, seeing that he was in the money for once, attached herself to him and they sat together at the corner table of that dimly-lit bar.

His hands lay on the table in front of him. They seemed to move nervously with a life of their own. The *demi-mondaine*, his companion, suddenly reached out to clasp them. "You have beautiful hands," she told him, pleased to find a topic of conversation now that George had relapsed into a drunken silence. "They are the hands of a musician!"

She gasped as the hands were wrenched violently from her grasp. He was sitting upright, his eyes bright and feverish. Sweat stood out on his forehead. For it seemed to him that his hands had moved of their own accord. At the woman's words, they had reacted with a thrill like that of a violent electric shock.

In the corner where they sat stood a broken down piano. Suddenly, he had an overwhelming urge to seat himself at it and play. But this was absurd, for he knew nothing of music . . . he had never played a note in his life—had never even thought of trying.

Driven by some strange compulsion, George sat at the battered instrument. As those around watched, attracted by the strange dream-like quality of his movements, they saw George's face become blank. His hands rested on the keyboard.

Then, he began to play.

For about a minute, there was silence in the cafe. Then, hoots and jeers cut across the music. To his uneducated hearers, the tune that George was playing meant nothing. It was not a gay melody that they could sing or whistle, not a popular tune of the moment, but a complex and subtle harmony. They had no time for such rubbish.

But George played on, like a man in a dream. And he *was* in a dream, for he made no conscious effort to produce the notes that came from the piano. He sat there like an automaton, while his hands moved of their own accord.

Later, George was never able to identify the piece of music he had played that first night in the cafe—the first time he had ever touched a piano. Whatever it was, it meant nothing to his hearers. Nor, at that time, did it to him.

Still in a daze, he left the cafe knowing, although his boorish audience had not, that what he had been playing was real music—*good* music!

Apart from the songs he heard bawled by his workmates, George knew absolutely nothing about music, but some unconscious instinct buried deep within him told him that what he had produced was something with real meaning.

What had he been playing? Or rather, what had his hands been playing? For George admitted to himself that he had been only a passive auditor of what his hands were creating without his conscious effort of will.

Next day, a leading Parisian music publisher was amazed to find a shabbily-dressed workman waiting in his office, who begged to be allowed to play the piano—the shining concert grand that stood in the outer office. The man was almost hysterical, driven by some compulsion.

Nodding to an assistant to fetch a gendarme to deal with this madman, the publisher tried to humor the lunatic until the law arrived to deal with him. He allowed George to take his place at the piano and waited, with a forced expression of expectation, as George's hands rested on the keyboard.

George had not played more than a few bars when the expression on the publisher's face underwent a sudden transformation. For the poorly-dressed, nervous man really could play, the publisher recognized that the music was by Mozart and he stood entranced as the baroque splendor of the music filled his office.

The gendarme arrived, only to be sent away with an

apology and a tip. George went on playing. The publisher noticed that his face was completely blank. He played without music and without glancing at the keyboard, he simply stared straight ahead like a man in a trance.

When George had finished, the publisher plied him with questions. Where had he learned to play so well? He was well up to concert standard—why was he dressed as a laborer? A talented musician should not lack employment in Paris, of all places!

Before George could answer, the publisher had produced a folio of sheet music. It was a recent work by Wagner, adapted for solo piano. Let George see what he could make of it. George looked at the pages of music in bewilderment.

Haltingly, he explained that he could not read music, that he had never touched a piano until the previous night, that he had no idea that what he had been playing had been the work of Mozart, for he had never heard it before!

Wisely, he did not even try to explain that it was his *hands* that were playing, not himself.

If the publisher had been a less patient, more skeptical man he might have suspected that a trick had been played on him. He might have had George thrown out—and the story of George Aubert would never have been told. Instead, he told George to go on playing—to play anything that came to him.

By the end of the day, the publisher's office was filled with members of the musical world of Paris. For hours they listened, while George played on and on. He played works by Beethoven, Chopin, Liszt—but returned again and again to the music of Mozart.

At last, he began to play a delicate, haunting piece that his listeners identified as being by Chopin. He had only played for a minute, when one of the audience sprang to his feet in amazement. Startled from his semi-trance, George stopped.

The man who had interrupted was a musician famous for his brilliant interpretation of Chopin. Now, he demanded to know where George had learned this particular piece. George explained once more that he had *never* learned it—he did not even know what it was. It had simply come to him.

The musician declared that George was either a fine composer, a fine liar—or both. For although the music they had just heard was indistinguishable in every way from the

work of Chopin—it had not been written by Chopin! It was a completely unknown piece, although good enough to have been written by the composer himself.

In spite of the sensation he had created, George found that few people would believe that he simply played automatically. When he tried to tell them about his hands, he met with knowing winks and grins.

The general opinion was that he was an excellent self-taught musician, who had been perfecting his technique for many years. He had learned a wide repertoire and had even composed his own pieces in the style of the masters. Now, he was attempting to cash in on his years of preparation.

Luckily, for George, one man present had an interest in psychical research. He heard George's strange remarks concerning his hands, and it occurred to him that here might be a genuine case of possession.

What if some dead genius had returned to the world to express himself through the hands of a Parisian workman?

He gave George money to buy decent clothes and find respectable lodgings. Then, having prepared in advance for a series of clinical tests to be made, he took George to the *Institut General Psychologique*, an organization famous for its investigations into supposedly paranormal happenings.

First, George was made to play in his normal manner. Then, he was blindfolded. It made no difference. To test whether he was, in fact, playing from memory and not automatically, as he claimed, a book was propped on the music stand in front of him.

While he played, George was made to read aloud from the book before his eyes. He read on and on in an expressionless voice. The quality of his playing remained the same.

A final test was made. While George continued to play and to read, tubes ending in earphones were placed over each of his ears. The tubes ran to the speakers of two early phonographs. Each phonograph was playing a different piece of music.

Reading aloud from a novel, with different pieces of music filling both ears, George continued to play with the same technical brilliance as before. Under these conditions, he even produced a piece that was identified as a previously unknown work by Liszt—perhaps the greatest master of the pianoforte who ever lived.

The researchers decided that George's playing was indeed automatic. His hands really were acting independently of

his conscious brain. But they still would not accept that he had no musical training, that his talent was coming from something outside himself, something that had taken possession of the hands he had always prized.

George's story ended sadly, for although psychic researchers were prepared to accept him as at least partly genuine, he was shunned by orthodox musicians, put down as a clever fraud. His original pieces were scoffed at as clumsy attempts at pastiche—although many unbiased listeners claimed that they might indeed be the work of the composers they so closely resembled.

George became little better than a freak, reduced to exhibiting his talents of playing while reading aloud and listening to other music in cheap music halls and cabarets. His position was made worse by the fact that he could not play to order. When he sat down at the piano, he had no idea of what his hands would play.

Aubert lived far enough into the 20th century to have made recordings of his playing. It is believed that such recordings were made, but if so they have disappeared. Maybe modern musicologists could have judged George's original pieces properly. Maybe modern psychoanalysts could have explained his "possession" away.

We shall never know, because in 1921, forgotten and alone, reduced once more to manual labor for a hard living, George Aubert cut his throat in a Paris slum with the very hands that had once seemed likely to shake the world to its foundations!

THE LAST OF THE WITCHES

Tring, in Hertfordshire, lies only a few miles north of London. For many years it has been a commuter suburb, from which electric trains full of bowler-hatted office workers and mini-skirted typists run every few minutes to the great metropolis.

Yet Tring, like many other English small towns, has seen its share of history. The parish church dates from the 15th century, while the wooden market house, where the local law officers once dispensed rough justice to wandering ped-

dlers, was built in 1750. The great mansion at Tring Park was the work of Sir Christopher Wren, builder of St. Paul's Cathedral.

But apart from these honored monuments, Tring has a much darker place in British history. For it was here, when the 19th century was drawing to its close, and steam trains already linked the quiet village to Victorian London, that the last act in an ancient drama of persecution was played out.

For over 500 years, until about 1760, one of the most bloody and unfair pieces of legislation in the English calendar had been rigidly enforced. This was the Witchcraft Act of 1323, reinforced by further Acts of 1563, 1604 and 1649. These laws were the products of the Middle Ages, of a time when God and the Devil were equally feared—and thought to be equally powerful.

There can be no doubt that many innocent people—senile old women, eccentrics, the mentally abnormal—suffered death as a result of these vicious laws. Over the period in which they were in force, it is estimated that more than 30,000 people were executed as witches.

If a cow fell sick because of poor husbandry, or a child died through neglect, it was a temptation for the truly guilty party to blame the mishap on some unpopular local figure. The village idiot, the friendless pauper with a harelip or the old woman with a reputation for telling fortunes—all were easy targets. And under the Witchcraft Acts, little proof was needed, for often a simple accusation by a person with money or influence could result in summary trial and a hideous death.

But, in Queen Victoria's England, this was all in the past. Such dark acts belonged to the old days; the witchcraft laws had been out of force for a century. The last legal execution for witchcraft had taken place in 1722, and in the age of steam, gas and electricity, of Imperial expansion, people no longer believed in the forces of evil—at least, not openly. But fear, suspicion and ignorance are strange bedfellows, especially in a society which considers itself civilized.

John and Ruth Osborne were both over 70. They lived in a ramshackle cottage that had changed little, except to become dirtier and more uncomfortable, since it had been erected 200 years before.

They had had one son, but he had been killed in the

Crimean War, and after his death they had drawn away from the world to live in isolation. To their neighbors they had become two stupid, ugly old people, miserably poor, who would finish their days in the parish workhouse if they did not first die of malnutrition.

One morning Old Mother Osborne, as Ruth had become known to the village boys who threw stones at the old hag as she stumbled along the street, visited a dairy to beg for a jug of buttermilk, the only food that her ailing husband could stomach.

The owner, Joseph Butterfield, refused. All the buttermilk he had to spare, he told her jeeringly, would go to fatten his hogs—not to fill the belly of a useless old man. His taunts drove Mother Osborne into a senile rage.

As she limped away, she cried out: "May the Devil take you—and your hogs with you!" She added a few muttered curses, which were understood to mean that she would make very sure that Butterfield was made sorry for his meanness.

For another year, the dairy business flourished, and Butterfield made so much money that he was able to take over the local inn. Himself a loud-mouthed bully, he soon attracted a similar crowd of customers.

Then, disaster struck. His pigs, on which he relied for a great part of his income, sickened and died, his ale turned sour in the cask, and worse still, Butterfield became subject to fits.

The obvious explanation for these misfortunes is that he neglected to tend his pigs or maintain his ale in good conditions because of his drunken habits. A lifetime of intemperance had weakened his constitution, and his fits were probably a form of delirium tremens.

But he was the last man to blame himself and encouraged by his customers, he came to believe that he had been "ill-wished," for as recently as seventy years ago, a strong streak of primitive superstition still ran through English country life.

It was suggested to Butterfield that he should employ the services of a "wise woman" to take off the "curse" that had fallen upon him.

A gypsy woman from Northampton was sent for and after pacing around the inn muttering a rigmarole of nonsense words, she announced that the forces of evil had indeed been enrolled against Butterfield. She produced a number of objects—blood-smeared feathers and a roughly-made doll

—which she claimed were evidence that the ancient forces of witchcraft were at work in Tring.

Whether the woman had planted these objects in advance, or whether she and Butterfield were in league together to create a vulgar sensation, will never be known. In any case, Butterfield and his friends believed that he was indeed the victim of witchcraft.

The culprits were not far to seek. After all, had not Mother Osborne openly cursed him? Surely, she and her husband must have some sinister reason for hiding their activities from the public view.

Whipped up by Butterfield, the feeling and suspicion against the Osbornes grew and Butterfield employed six local vagrants to stand guard on his house. Armed with pitchforks, they wore charms provided by the "wise woman" around their necks. Yet, Butterfield's misfortunes continued.

Urged on by his more violent friends, among whom was a chimney-sweep called Thomas Colley, Butterfield decided that stronger measures must be taken. In the old times, he remembered, those accused of witchcraft had been ducked in the pond known as Marston Mere.

Why not revive this good old custom? The suggestion excited great interest among the villagers and, although the matter must have come to their notice, the police took no action. However, it must be remembered that the police force had not long been established, and in rural areas its organization was not much better than the old system of parish watchmen had been.

So Butterfield and his cronies made their plans quite openly. By this time, Butterfield became rather worried at the furor he had created, so Colley, the sweep, master-minded the campaign to persecute the Osbornes.

Whenever either of the old couple appeared in public, they were subjected to a barrage of stones and an attempt was made to burn down their cottage. Yet, as Butterfield's fits continued, Colley began to think more and more about "ducking them in the Mere."

On a Saturday in April, people attending markets in Hertfordshire towns were amazed to hear a proclamation read by a man in a rough uniform intended to look like that of a town crier. Questioned later, the man admitted that an unknown man had promised him five shillings to read out the notice in as many towns as he could.

He claimed that he had thought the notice to be a joke, for it read: "Take notice that, on Monday next, a man and a woman are to be publicly ducked at Tring, in this county, for their wicked crimes." No one who had heard of the Osborne affair was in any doubt as to who the unfortunate couple would be.

Only one man took any action to save the Osbornes from what would be, at best, a terrifying experience. Ralph Barton, the overseer of the parish workhouse at Tring, bravely decided that he would help the old couple. He had them admitted to the workhouse.

But Colley's attempts to whip up a mob had succeeded beyond his own or anyone else's expectations. On the following Monday, a crowd of about 500 men surrounded the Tring workhouse. They were in holiday mood for it was Whit Monday and most of them were drunk.

The old, brutal sports of cockfighting and bull or bear baiting had been put down. Prize-fighting had been declared illegal, but violence must find some outlet, and the prospect of tormenting a pair of helpless old people appealed to the worst instincts of the mob. Butterfield, the original cause of all the trouble, had prudently stayed away.

Colley acted as spokesman, and demanded that Barton should hand over the Osbornes. Barton had attempted to send for police protection, but could find nobody willing to take his message. He attempted to talk to the angry crowd.

In spite of his declaration that the Osbornes were not in the building, the mob broke into the workhouse. They searched it from top to bottom, even breaking down the ceilings to peer into the rafters. Barton had told the truth—the Osbornes were not there.

Frustrated, the furious men turned on the workhouse master. With a shock of horror, Barton realized that he was no longer dealing with a crowd of drunken roisterers out for a day's rough sport. What he faced now was a lynch-mob, determined not to be balked of their victim.

In fear of his life, for Colley threatened to burn the workhouse to the ground with its master inside, Barton admitted that he had hidden the Osbornes in the vestry of the local church. The drunken crowd streamed away, Colley at their head.

The vestry door was smashed down. Screaming with terror, the Osbornes were dragged out. Colley, at the head

of his gang of bullies, accused them in the most foul language of practicing withcraft.

Old Mother Osborne made a fatal mistake—though it is doubtful if anything she said could have saved her at this stage. She admitted that she had worked charms against Butterfield, but maintained that her husband knew nothing. Thus, the illiterate, superstitious old woman condemned herself in the eyes of the mob.

With rough hands, Colley ripped the threadbare clothes from Mother Osborne's body. Ugly and naked, she was exposed to the jeers of the crowd. Others did the same to John Osborne.

Hustled along in the midst of the shouting, laughing crowd, the Osbornes were half-carried, half-dragged the two miles to Marston Mere. At the side of the pool, their thumbs were tied to their toes, pulling their limbs cross-wise across their bodies, in accordance with the ancient formula for ducking witches.

According to tradition, the guilt or innocence of witches may be established in this way. Trussed, they are cast into the water. If guilty, they float; if innocent, they sink. But there was no doubt of Mother Osborne's guilt—and in any case Colley and his ruffians were determined to extract the full value from their sport.

A rope was tied around Mother Osborne's waist and she was thrown into the pool. Several times, she was dragged across from side to side. After being dragged under the water several times, she lost consciousness. She was hauled out and left by the side of the pool. Attention turned to her husband.

John Osborne was treated in exactly the same way as his wife. Then, when his half-drowned body was at last taken out, Mother Osborne's ordeal was repeated. Both the Osbornes suffered this treatment three times.

Colley decided that this sport had begun to pall. Untying the rope from Mother Osborne's waist, and loosing her thumbs and her toes, he had her tossed once more into the pool. She thrashed about wildly in five feet of water.

Colley had provided himself with a long pole. Now, as the drunken mob cheered him on, he stood on the bank prodding at the floundering woman. The crowd roared their approval as Mother Osborne tried vainly to wrest the pole from his hands, only to slip back under the stagnant water.

At last, she ceased her struggles. While the mob still

howled with laughter, she was hauled onto the bank. Gradually, from where her pathetic body lay, silence began to spread through the crowd. Mother Osborne was dead.

But nothing could daunt the swaggering Colley. With his hat in his hand he moved around the crowd, suggesting that they should now donate money to him in recognition of the fine sport he had provided! Even those who had followed him most willingly now drew away. Colley upended a bottle of rum and drank deeply.

The police arrived too late. Rumor of their approach gave the lynchers, so brave when faced only by their helpless victims, time to fade away. The constables found only Colley, sitting dead drunk on the bank with his back against the corpse of Mother Osborne. Her dying husband lay beside them.

Later, that day, the police found Butterfield's body, too. For he had died "of natural causes" when he had fallen into his deserted pig-styes. . . .

The bodies were taken back to the workhouse, and a coroner's inquest was swiftly convened. The coroner found that the Osbornes had been "suffocated to death with mud and water," after being severely beaten. The inquest jury returned a verdict of murder against "one Thomas Colley and other persons."

Colley was arrested. Proof of his guilt was overwhelming, but he attempted to brazen out his situation. He had, he declared, been a friend of the Osbornes! His only motive in accompanying the lynch mob was to see that they came to no grave harm. He had several times attempted to rescue the Osbornes from the water!

Colley was sentenced to death. All that can be said in his favor is that he steadfastly refused to name any other members of the mob. Although several of these were known it was thought that there was insufficient evidence to bring them to trial, since they would certainly protect each other.

After being sentenced, Colley seems to have undergone a change of heart. He made a full confession of his guilt and expressed his sorrow in what seemed to be genuine repentance. He was, in spite of his brutal and degraded character, an educated man. On the night before his execution he wrote a statement which he asked might be read out in the places where he had caused the ducking proclamation to be read.

In part, this read: "With the sincerity of a dying man, I

declare that I do not believe there is such a being as a witch . . . I beg of you all to pray to God to forgive me for my wickedness."

A battalion of soldiers surrounded the prison where Colley was executed, since the authorities feared that a popular demonstration might be made in his favor. They were wrong. The witch mania that had swept Tring, as it had swept the whole country 300 years before, had ended as suddenly as it had begun.

It was the last time that this ancient madness was to manifest itself in England.

THE SHIP OF FEAR

She came at them out of the chill sea mists—a black, twisted hulk, creaking and groaning in the wind as she sliced through the icy sea.

This seemed no helpless, empty wreck, though, drifting at the whim of wind and current. The gray waters parted smartly before her prow, sending up a bow-wave of white foam.

Yet, as she came nearer, they saw she *was* a wreck: there were jagged cracks in her timbers, her deck had collapsed, and her masts were nothing but stumps.

Then, a shiver of fear swept down every spine, for the crew of the exploration whaler had crowded to the rails as the ghost ship roared and cracked its way closer and closer. In their eyes, in their hearts were not only fear, but incredulity and the terrible apprehension that something supernatural was happening here in the somber gray wastes of the Canadian Arctic.

They knew this ship. But not only that, they had watched her die—smashed to splinters on the rocks of Frobisher Bay nine months before.

It had been in September, 1860 that the *George Henry* and her stout little supply ship *Rescue* had come to the Arctic to explore and chart the coasts, to catch whales and trade with the Eskimos.

One evening, they lay at anchor in Frobisher Bay, in the south of Baffin Island. It was a savage, uncompromising

place, all flat, soulless, frozen shore, fringed with wicked looking rocks and surrounded by floating ice and gray water. Suddenly, a gale blew up, clutching huge waves from the surface of the sea and turning the bay into a churning mass of water.

Within two hours, by 10:30, the wind had risen to a shriek, and the waves were battering away at both ships, throwing them up one minute, pounding down on the decks the next. Across the water, Captain Hall could see that the *Rescue* was in difficulties.

"She's dragging her anchor," the lookout bellowed above the noise of the storm. Frozen to the marrow by the wind, soaked by icy sprays of water, Captain Hall and his men stood helplessly and watched the *Rescue* as she lay trapped in the grip of the storm.

The waves seemed to be playing with her, throwing her backwards and forwards, but always bringing her a little nearer to the rocks. Then, suddenly, the waves tired of the game. One huge mass of water rose up, caught her broadside on and slammed her down with a hideous splintering of wood.

The sea frothed up around the rocks, its whiteness dotted here and there with pieces of black timber.

It seemed to be the end, but the storm had not finished with the *Rescue* and neither had the sea. The rocks held her like a vise on one side, while the sea smashed away on the other, reducing her to what seemed a total wreck.

Then, it began to snow and a curtain of white mercifully hid the terrible scene.

A deep sadness pervaded the *George Henry*. To the crew, hardened and hardy though they were, it had been like watching murder and being unable to do anything about it. They knew there had been nothing they could have done, but they did not feel the tragedy less deeply for that.

But the *George Henry* had a job to do and once the storm had subsided, Captain Hall ordered the crew to weigh anchor. The ship continued its explorations alone. From time to time a whale was sighted and killed, a necessary part of the expedition, since this provided money towards its cost.

The whaler returned home, but eight months later, she came back to the Arctic and to Frobisher Bay.

The bay was blanketed in fog when the ship anchored and, as it cleared next morning, Captain Hall began to wonder whether this really was Frobisher Bay? For when he

gazed along the rocky shoreline, he could see no trace of that tragic wreck.

He knew from experience that some visible sign, however small, should have remained of the drama, even months later. But, as hard as he searched, he could see nothing.

Then, he looked at the charts he had made. Yes, this *was* Frobisher Bay. The storm, Captain Hall decided, must have finished off the *Rescue* so completely that she had vanished, at least as far as he could see.

To satisfy himself, the Captain took a party ashore and there, among the ragged rocks, they found all that remained of their supply ship—a few spars and the stumps of a couple of masts. The rest, it seemed, had been washed out to sea.

Sad, but satisfied, Captain Hall returned to his ship and officially noted in his log that the *Rescue* had been well and truly lost.

Then, the whaler weighed anchor and went on her way. As Captain Hall mapped the coastline, his lookout scanned the sea for whales, but they seemed out of luck. For days on end not one was sighted and the sailors, not the least superstitious of men, began to murmur that the expedition must be jinxed. And it must have something to do with the previous year's disaster.

Their worst fears were confirmed on July 27, 1861, when the phantom ship loomed towards them out of the icy mists.

She seemed set on ramming the *George Henry* and as the distance between the two ships lessened, the crew saw to their horror that there was no one aboard. Then, the mate, more clear-headed than the rest, rushed to the wheel and swung it hard. And the *Rescue* swept past only feet away.

By now, though, that whaler was a ship of fear. Every creak of the yardarms, every flapping of a sail seemed an omen of more evil to come. That evening, the wind freshened and the superstitions turned to terror. For a gale blew up, a gale as strong and as malevolent as the one which had led to the wreck of the *Rescue*.

Worse still, great blocks of ice began crunching against the *George Henry's* hull. As the ship began to drag her anchor, the crew hacked and pushed at the ice with pikes and crowbars.

Then, on the horizon, a jagged familiar black shadow came into sight. . . .

It was coming towards them—the *Rescue* again, once more making straight for the *George Henry*, sidestepping

the ice floes as if guided by some expert hand. This time, though the *George Henry* would be unable to move out of the way; she was trapped inexorably in the ice.

As the *Rescue* approached, the crew shrank back from the rails, expecting to be flung within minutes into the freezing Arctic waters where no man could possibly survive.

The phantom ship was two hundred yards away, then one hundred. Her speed quickened. Fifty yards separated the ships, then thirty. . . .

Then, miraculously, she turned! She was so close that the crew could smell the dank rottenness of her timbers. With only inches to spare, the *Rescue* scraped past. Under the incredulous eyes of the watching crew, the black hulk faded once more into the mist and disappeared from sight.

This time, she left behind the certainty that this was no accident, that the drama was not over. The *Rescue*, it seemed, was tantalizing them, bringing them face to face with sudden death, then with a just as sudden reprieve. But, the crew were convinced, the ghost would return, and finish them off as a punishment for doing nothing when she had been wrecked the year before.

That night was a wild one, with the high wind screaming eerily in the rigging and the sea tossing restlessly about the ship. Anxious eyes peered into the blackness, fearing the *Rescue* would appear again, but when morning dawned, the sea was empty, except for the ice floes.

The crew worked as usual all through that day, but hardly a moment went by without an apprehensive glance at the horizon. Evening came, but nothing had appeared.

Then, just as the men were sitting down to their meal, there came a crash. The cook had dropped a plate of soup and was standing, white and shaking, staring with terror-stricken eyes out of the porthole.

There was the *Rescue*. But this time, she was not moving, only rising and falling with the swell. She was floating, as if at anchor, at the exact spot where these same sailors had seen her smashed to pieces on the rocks nine months ago.

In a way, the sight was even more sinister than before. For the *Rescue* seemed silent, calm, but somehow menacing, haunting the scene of her death.

It was a sleepless night on board the whaler. Most of the crew spent it on deck, standing mute and motionless, never taking their eyes from the *Rescue*.

Then, at three in the morning, the phantom began to move

closer. This time, it was a gentle motion, as if whatever devil had steered her before had gone, leaving her nothing but a pathetic drifting derelict.

Or was this some more subtle move, the crew thought, aimed at calming their fears for a moment, catching them off guard and smashing into them before anyone had time to reach the wheel and steer out of the way?

No one knew, but they all watched as the hulk edged closer to them. Once more they heard the groaning of her timbers, but to some of them at least, the sound seemed more like a plaintive farewell than the angry creakings of a ship bent on vengeance.

By evening the wind freshened again and the *Rescue* was moving faster, but this time she was moving away from the *George Henry*. She was going out to sea.

Slowly, she disappeared from sight, and the icy mists closed behind her. Next morning, she was gone. And even the most superstitious of the sailors knew they would never see her again.

They never did, nor did anyone else.

No one has ever been able to explain the mystery, though the entire crew of a ship saw what happened.

By all the usual rules, the *Rescue* should never have been afloat when the *George Henry* returned to Frobisher Bay in May, 1861. And even if she had somehow survived the storm, eight months in the Arctic among the rocks and ice floes should have finished her off.

Doubts remained for as long as they lived in the minds of those who witnessed these eerie happenings. Some suggested that possibly visibility had been so bad on the night the *Rescue* seemed to be wrecked, that they had not really seen what happened; perhaps the *Rescue* had not been so completely smashed that September night.

It would not have been the first time that a floating wreck had remained afloat unmanned for months in those waters.

But then what about the pathetic remnants Captain Hall and his party had found among the rocks? No other ship had been reported lost on that spot in the interim. So where did the wreckage come from?

No, it was obvious to the witnesses that the *Rescue* must have somehow been materialized out of the splinters in which the sea had left her, by some supernatural force they dared not even contemplate. That done, she had returned to the *George Henry* to terrify her crew . . . and then

to disappear forever in the vast, lonely waters of the Arctic Ocean.

What really happened? Only the sea knows and the sea keeps its secrets forever.

THE POINTING BONES

Even at the beginning of the 20th century, the continent of Australia preserved some of the character of the old American West of fifty years before. Outside the big cities, life in the outback was much the same for the Australian stockrider as it had been for the American cowboy.

The last of the bushrangers was not long dead; the legend of Ned Kelly was still a recent memory. The mounted troopers of the Australian Police were few and far between—one man might be expected to patrol hundreds of square miles of wild country.

In the scattered ranches along the foot of the Great Dividing Range, not more than 100 miles west of Sydney, there were many occasions when the law of the fist, or the gun, prevailed over the laws made by city men in stuffy offices.

One such ranch, in the Blue Mountains, was the property of John McAvoy, who had come from Scotland to seek his fortune in the new land about twenty years before the events that followed the "pointing of the bones."

McAvoy had prospered in the young country. A strong, fearless man, he had started as a wandering stockrider, selling his strength to the man who offered the best wages. When the other men rode into Sydney for their monthly spree, McAvoy rode with them. But his first visit was not to the tavern, but to the bank to deposit his cash.

As a result, he was now the owner of his own spread, running more than five thousand head of sheep. He was a rich man with an attractive wife and a young family. He loved them as he loved his property—with a jealous passion. No man who valued a whole skin would meddle with McAvoy's possessions.

One afternoon, a rider brought word to McAvoy that a party of aborigines had settled on his land and were making

camp. The Australian "abo" has been a wanderer since long before the white man took his country. Even now, educated aborigines living in town settlements will suddenly be seized with the desire to "go walkabout."

McAvoy knew this, but he also knew that the aborigines had little regard for the laws of property. Themselves a hospitable, though primitive, folk, they saw no harm in taking the odd sheep for their cooking pots.

Most farmers would have shrugged their shoulders. The "abo" never stayed long in one place—and anyway they were miserably poor and, at that time, often ill-treated by the authorities. Who would grudge them a bit of mutton for once? Two days—and they would be gone.

But this was not McAvoy's way. He had labored long years to build up his ranch, and no bunch of thieving, black wanderers were going to take so much as a blade of grass. He called for his horse and rifle.

Next to his ranch and his family, McAvoy loved his horse. It was a great chestnut stallion, with a strong streak of the real Arab blood in its breeding. In the rough steeplechases that were organized by the local farming community, McAvoy was a feared opponent, certain to start favorite whenever he raced.

With a touch of poetry that may seem strange in such a dour man, he had named his horse Rio Grande. The surging power that lay in the beast had somehow brought to his mind the vision of the great river of the sea-chanty he had heard on the immigrant ship.

Now McAvoy saddled up Rio Grande and rode out to drive the unwanted visitors off his land. It was a long ride, but he welcomed it. For in a week's time he was to ride Rio Grande in his most important race yet, the Townships' Chase to Sydney—for a prize of a silver cup and 200 guineas. The horse was carrying a little too much weight over the ribs, and the present exercise was just what it needed.

With McAvoy went Joe Blue, one of his hired hands, himself a half-caste aborigine. These half-castes were despised both by their own people and by the white men, but they were brilliant trackers and willing workers for low wages.

McAvoy and Blue approached the aborigine camp. Already, battered pots—throw-outs from some farmer's kitch-

en—were steaming over a straggling fire. As they approached, the aborigines rose to their feet.

They were a miserable looking crew. One very old, toothless man, and two younger men, all stark naked, three women, wearing only breechclouts, and a pair of young children. In addition, the younger of the women carried a baby at her shriveled breast. McAvoy surveyed them with distaste.

There were no signs of a sheep having been butchered, but McAvoy had seen some of his stock grazing nearby and was in doubt as to what the cooking pot contained. Still, he ordered Joe Blue to inquire what they were cooking.

Blue spoke briefly to one of the men in the clicks and grunts of which, to European ears, the aborigine language consists. Turning to McAvoy, he said, briefly: "Joey," meaning that the pot contained young kangaroo meat.

McAvoy swore a short, disbelieving oath. Without waiting for more talk, he rode Rio Grande up to the cooking fire. Bending from his saddle, he reached out his riding crop and tipped over the pans. There was a hiss as the liquid from the stewing meat ran into the embers. One of the women let out a shrill cry.

The meat that had fallen from the pots into the ashes was black and rubbery. This was not freshly killed mutton, but dried kangaroo meat that had been carried for days. The "abos" had been telling the truth.

Now, the younger men and the women were clustered around McAvoy, crying out in their strange, guttural tongue. He turned Rio Grande and forced his way through them. The great horse shouldered its way disdainfully between the black, wrinkled bodies. The very old man had not uttered a sound. He squatted on the ground, gazing straight ahead.

McAvoy pointed with his whip towards the mountains. The gesture was unmistakable. He was ordering them to get off his land—fast! He added emphasis by slashing his whip once, viciously, through the empty air.

One of the men was speaking to Joe Blue. Blue glanced over at McAvoy, his face troubled. He decided to risk telling his boss what had been said.

"Blackfella say—all plenty tired. Woman belong baby, plenty sick. Got to rest . . . eat. Baby die, maybe, else."

As Blue spoke, the woman without the child had come

up to Rio Grande's side. Gently, she laid a hand on the horse's neck and looked up at McAvoy pleadingly. Almost without thinking, furious that one of these "animals" should touch his beloved horse, McAvoy cut fiercely at her arm. She cried out in pain and fell back.

For a moment, McAvoy was almost sorry. Then, his anger rose at having been provoked into making a gesture that he felt to have brought him down to the same level as the primitive people who faced him. He spoke with deliberate roughness.

"They have one hour to get off my land. If they don't go, there'll be more of the whip before I turn them in to the police troopers! Tell them!"

As Blue delivered his message, McAvoy turned to ride off. Suddenly, he became aware that the very old man was watching him intently from deeply-sunk but very bright eyes. As Blue finished speaking, the old man spat into the ashes of the fire, where the spoiled meat had now charred to cinders.

As McAvoy rode off, he heard the old man speak in a high yet firm voice, as far as he could judge aborigine intonation. Then he was riding away from the nomads across the coarse grass of the sheep run. He heard Joe Blue cantering up beside him.

Joe's face was a dirty gray. He looked like a man who had been badly frightened. His mental state became obvious when he reached across to grab at McAvoy's bridle rein. Before McAvoy could curse him for his impudence, Blue poured out a disjointed stream of warning.

The old man, he said, was a wise-man. He had uttered a word of power that Blue knew, from his aborigine mother, to be one that only a witchdoctor of great standing dare use. And he had uttered a dreadful threat.

He had threatened that, if the baby died as a result of McAvoy driving them from their camp, he would "point the bone" at McAvoy. McAvoy's anger faded. He threw back his head and laughed at Joe's trembling fear and backward superstition.

He knew, as did anyone who had spent time in the bush, of the aborigine ceremony of "pointing the bones." If a man annoyed a witchdoctor, then the witchdoctor would take three bones from his collection of magical gear and cast them on the ground. If the bones fell in an arrowhead shape pointing towards the victim—and a good witchdoctor

had sufficient skill of hand to insure that they would—then the man who had been "pointed" would die within days.

McAvoy had met oldtimers who swore that they had known this to happen—but McAvoy had never believed them. Besides, maybe an ignorant savage could be scared to death by such rubbish, but certainly not a hard-headed European!

Still, the old man had uttered threats. Angrily, McAvoy decided that he would ride over to the police post and have a trooper sent after the aborigines. A spell in the stockade would teach them not to offer resistance to a white man!

Two days later, Trooper Halloran rode up to McAvoy's ranchhouse. He had had a long, thirsty ride for nothing. He answered McAvoy's questions with a few curt words.

The aborigine group had gone. There was no sign of them on McAvoy's land, or anywhere else. And he had better things to do than ride the outbacks looking for a blackfella who had insulted Mister High-and-mighty McAvoy!

After a glass of beer, the trooper grew more affable. As he went out to his horse, which Joe Blue was holding for him to mount, he turned to McAvoy with a grin.

"Maybe you haven't got an aborigine camp on your land, but you sure got the beginnings of an abo burying ground! They'd buried something before they left, so I took a look. It was a little abo Joey, not more than a few months old!"

Joe Blue gave a muffled gasp, unheard by the trooper as he swung into his saddle and cantered away. Blue and McAvoy were left staring at each other. McAvoy knew what was coming.

But before Blue could remind him of the aborigine's threat, he had turned on his heel and stalked back into the ranchhouse. The half-caste watched him go—and shrugged his shoulders. Soon be time to start looking for a new boss-fella!

There were three days to go to the big race in Sydney. With Rio Grande, now trained down to perfection, in a special traveling wagon, McAvoy set off on the long trip to Sydney. His family and some of his hands accompanied him.

After two nights spent camping by the bush tracks, they reached the outskirts of the city. McAvoy had been occupied in fussing over his horse. He had put the old aborigine's curse out of his mind completely. Or so he thought.

On the morning of the race, the guests in the hotel where McAvoy and his family were staying were rudely awakened by a fearful sound. It was the scream of a man who had seen death staring him in the face—the cry of a soul lost in torment.

John McAvoy, his tanned face pale, sat up in bed with great drops of sweat pouring from his body. He shook convulsively. For the scream had been ripped from him by what he had seen in his sleep.

He would make no answer to his wife's anxious questions. With a huge effort of will, he pulled himself together and began to dress in silence. Normally a hearty eater, he would take no breakfast. All who knew him were at a loss to guess what might be wrong. Joe Blue could have told them.

By the time they reached the racetrack, McAvoy had recovered some of his normal composure. But he was still silent and withdrawn. Something seemed to be preying on his mind.

A last check on his horse showed that Rio Grande was in top condition. The great chestnut stood in the paddock calmly. McAvoy took heart from the behavior of his horse as he went off to change into his racing silks.

But the other riders, all of whom knew him well from local race meetings, noticed a curious air of preoccupation. A few rough jokes were made, suggesting why McAvoy was so silent. The general opinion was that his wife had been nagging him.

At last, while they were waiting for the riders to be called for the main event, McAvoy broke his silence. He had decided that the best thing to do was to laugh the whole thing off. As the other jockeys listened attentively, he told them of his dream the night before.

He had been riding in the race—the Townships' Chase in which he was to ride today. Rio Grande had been going well as they completed the first circuit of the course. Over the lower brush fences, the horse had lengthened his stride and taken the lead.

Now they were racing down the long straight stretch that led to the worst obstacle on the steeplechase course—the Stone Wall. In the tough days of early Australian racing, this was a real stone wall. Nearly seven feet high, it presented a formidable barrier. A horse that misjudged the jump might well be killed, and its rider lucky to escape without serious injury.

As McAvoy came to this part of his dream, his hearers noticed that he clenched his fists as if reliving the experience. He stared ahead as if in the grip of some powerful compulsion.

In McAvoy's dream, he had been thundering down the straight towards the Stone Wall. He knew he was in the lead, but suddenly he became aware that other horses had come up with him and were boxing him in. With the tricky jump ahead, these were dangerous tactics.

He had turned to shout a warning to the other riders. To tell them to fall back, like good sportsmen. The man riding shoulder to shoulder with him had smiled. It was Dan Connor, an old friend. Dan Connor—who had been dead for ten years!

As McAvoy told it, he had recognized the other riders in a split second. James Henderson, drowned in the Snowy River five years before; Patrick Reilly, died of malaria in northern Queensland; Dougal Houston, broke his neck in a riding accident. The riders who surrounded him were all dead men, their mounts the pale horses of death!

In his dream, McAvoy had frantically tried to hold Rio Grande back. With the phantom riders all around, there was no room to take the jump. But Rio Grande had plunged on. With the force of a thunderbolt, they had struck the Stone Wall squarely. Then—nothing.

As McAvoy finished his story, the riders for the Townships' Chase were called. As they walked over to the paddock, McAvoy's friends clapped him on the back and tried to cheer him up.

It was a real good tale, they said—just the thing to frighten the kids with. But now forget it. Anyway, everyone knew that dreams went by opposites. It probably meant that McAvoy was due to win the race, for which he was the favorite in any case.

As McAvoy mounted Rio Grande and shortened his stirrups, he was still silent. He made no reply to his friends' good wishes or his wife's encouragement. He did not meet Joe Blue's sidelong glance. Then, he cantered down to the start.

The Townships' Chase was a three-mile race. Three circuits of the course, thirty fences to be jumped. Three times, the riders must face the hazard of the Stone Wall. Many of the crowd, hoping for cheap thrills at the riders' expense,

had posted themselves opposite the Wall, where the worst falls were likely to occur.

The starter's flag came down. They were off! McAvoy was lying fourth out of the twenty runners as they swept over the first fence. Rio Grande was running like some superb machine, effortlessly.

As the horses approached the Stone Wall for the first time, McAvoy was well up with the leaders. He was known as a rider who never gave ground, a man who rode ruthlessly to win. As they came up for the dangerous jump, spectators were surprised to see McAvoy shorten rein and fall back, letting the other horses around him pull clear to take the Wall.

Rio Grande sailed over the Wall with a foot to spare. McAvoy began to make up the ground he had lost. He took the other fences with reckless daring. Rio Grande's stride never faltered; the great horse cleared the jumps as though they were not there.

But on the second circuit, with McAvoy once more disputing the lead, the same thing happened. At the Stone Wall, McAvoy fell back, giving himself more time and more space to take the jump. A whisper ran around the crowd: McAvoy had lost his nerve. Backers of Rio Grande began to think of hedging their bets.

But, once over the Wall for the second time, McAvoy began to lengthen rein, giving the big chestnut his head. As they came past the stand for the last time, to begin the final circuit, Rio Grande was in second place.

Over one brush fence. Over another. Rio Grande a length clear now, leading the field. Into the long straight before the Stone Wall. Rio Grande, running like a train, six lengths clear. McAvoy was bent low over the horse's neck as they went down to the Stone Wall.

Fifty yards to the Wall. Rio Grande first, the rest nowhere. McAvoy had all the time in the world to make the tricky jump and then take the easy run-in to the winning post. Thirty yards to the Wall.

McAvoy straightened from his jockey's crouch. Spectators against the rail could see his face working furiously as he wrenched at the reins, trying to turn Rio Grande's head. He was acting like a man who is boxed in, trying to find room to make his jump. Yet he was clear of the field—out on his own!

Foam flecks spraying from the bit, Rio Grande charged

the Stone Wall. The spectators saw McAvoy's hands dragging at the reins. They saw his white, terrified face. He screamed, in a terrible voice: "Make room! Damn you—make room!"

Rio Grande struck the Wall without slackening pace, without breaking stride. Men nearby swore that they heard the snap as the horse's neck broke at the impact.

McAvoy was thrown forward. His body hit the top of the Wall with a sickening thud. Even as they ran to pick him up, while the riders behind reined in their mounts, they knew he was as dead as the horse he had loved.

Joe Blue reached the Wall just as the doctor was pulling a blanket over McAvoy's broken body. Disregarding the objections of his social superiors, the half-caste fought his way through the crowd of morbid onlookers. He had to make sure!

He found the doctor looking at something that lay in the short grass at the foot of the Wall. Blue knew what it would be. It was a rough arrowhead, formed by three small bones.

The doctor spoke as if to himself: "That's strange! Those are human bones if I'm any judge, but very small. Looks as if they came from a child!"

FROM A FAR PLACE

Nancy Trent was a tall, slim girl with fair hair and dark, cool eyes. She was neat, practical and pretty. There was an air of composure about her, an unruffled calm, and work as a secretary for my London publishers was proof of these qualities.

Then, one morning in May 1957, I met her outside my office in Fleet Street. At first, I noticed she seemed unusually hesitant. After some moments of conversation, she began to approach her real purpose.

"I was thinking, Mr. Macklin—with all these studies you've done, you know, of the world of spirits and that kind of thing. You must have heard of a lot of funny things . . ."

I agreed and she went on to say the subject was fascinating. It seemed to me that she was playing for time, almost about to come to a decision. At last, she came to the point, her manner brisk.

"The truth is, *I've* had a strange experience. It may be nothing, but it is sort of worrying. I wondered if you might be interested? It's one of those things most people wouldn't understand."

As she had always seemed a sensible sort of girl I felt that any experience she might have had of psychical phenomena would be reliable, so we went into a coffee shop and I listened to her story.

From my training as a journalist I took notes—during my life I have learned it is essential to treat the supernatural with the same kind of respect one treats the known. Curiously, facts are even more important, even if they are only statements, in the world of the unknown than in the supposed world of reality.

Nancy Trent's story was trivial in one sense—and in another sense oddly disturbing. . . .

Two days before, on May 5, she had been waiting in Wood Green for the bus that would take her to work. At last, the winter had gone and the promise of summer lay ahead. Even at this early hour the day was warm and, although Nancy was of a practical turn of nature, she couldn't help sinking into thoughts of months ahead.

A stream of cars passed, but she didn't really see them. They were part of the scenery and the inevitable background to life in London. But one passing car caught her attention. There was a shape at the window, oddly recognizable, and strangely familiar. She stared hard as a face turned towards her. . . .

Then it was swept on in the tide of traffic. For a second she could have sworn she had seen her fiancé, John Paisley. It had been so like him, the same set of the shoulders, the same lazy glance.

But that was impossible! For John had been in Kenya for the past year on a tour of duty as a forestry officer. They had become engaged before he left and had decided to postpone their marriage until he returned.

It was obviously a trick of the mind she thought, an illusion. Perhaps she was missing him more than she realized. The incident was forgotten in the bustle of the day, but when she returned home that evening it returned. Her mother was amused and sympathetic. She pointed out that it did show how much Nancy cared, that she was lucky to know real love. Nancy agreed and remembered the regular

letters from John, all of which were a constant reminder of their deep affection for each other.

The next morning Nancy decided to take an alternative route to work. It was something she did if she happened to be late leaving home, as she was on this particular morning. The fastest journey was by the underground and soon she was in the heart of the morning migration to the city center. Girls in gay dresses, serious men in bowler hats, young men in modern suits—all were moving automatically to their destinations.

Nancy, like most of them, ignored the crowds, the pushing and the noise. By doing so she could accept the discomfort of the journey. In fact, it was often an opportunity for planning her day or considering a problem that might have occurred.

Her station arrived and she was swept along by the crowd when she noticed a man some yards ahead. He was wearing a gray suit and his thick, dark hair curled slightly over his collar. She stared and would have stopped, if the crowd had not swept her on. The figure moved on, partly obscured by the crowd, but she was *certain* that it was her fiancé!

Desperately, she tried to push through the crowd, but no one gave way. The elevator door was open and the man entered in a surge of people. As Nancy stared he turned and his calm eyes lingered on her for a moment. The lift ascended and he was gone.

She hurried forward, but it was too late. Once she reached the street there was no sign of him. It was—*must* have been—an illusion. John was in Kenya, thousands of miles away, working and saving for the day of their marriage. He could not be here in London, she reasoned.

Yet, this was the second time she had seen him—the man who looked like John or was, indeed, him. There was no doubt in her mind that the man she had seen was John. She could not be mistaken about someone she loved and knew so well.

A disturbing solution came to her. It was no more than a possibility, but it could be the truth. If John had decided against marriage, if he had decided to leave Kenya would he have told her?

The doubts gnawed at her throughout the day. After all, she hadn't seen John for a year. It was a long time, and anything could happen in such a time. People could change,

have new aims—and fall in or out of love. There had been no hint of any change in his letters, of course, but perhaps it had been a sudden decision.

Before going home that evening she decided to say nothing about the matter to her mother. If it was a mistake, an illusion, there would be no point. If it was true it would cause too much trouble. It was something she had to bear alone. So as she entered the house she tried to look calm and relaxed. And then she saw a letter from John lying on the hall table. She recognized his writing immediately.

For a moment, she was afraid to read it. If the man she had seen was John perhaps this letter was an explanation—a note of apology, a way of saying goodbye. She hesitated a little longer and then knew she had to face the truth, whatever it was.

Quickly she ripped open the envelope and began to read. "Don't forget, darling," she read. "Only three months to go and then we'll be together. Honestly, I don't know how I've managed to last all this time without seeing you. Well, I have—and in a funny kind of way I'm not really apart from you. Sometimes I'm alone—my job takes me up country to places where I can be the only man for hundreds of miles. At times like that I think of you. I can see you, I can remember you so clearly, the way your hair falls over your eyes sometimes, your smile and all the other things that make you special. . . ."

Reading his words she could hear his voice. It was as if he was there in the room. In that instant the distance between them seemed meaningless, insignificant. She knew that nothing had changed—their love was too strong, too real to be altered by time or distance.

That was the story she told me: "Does it sound silly, Mr. Macklin or was it just imagination? I suppose it must have been. I mean, everything's all right now. But for a time I did wonder—I even thought John might have changed."

"He's a lucky man, Nancy." I said. "I don't suppose he has doubts about that. To be honest, the story isn't unusual. It is quite possible for people who are very close to believe they have seen one another, even if the evidence is against it. I think it is usually longing, a kind of wish fulfillment."

She smiled and I couldn't help reflecting how rare real love is—a kind of ecstasy experienced only once in a lifetime.

I had almost forgotten the incident within 24 hours, for

I was preparing to leave for Cornwall and I was clearing some work before leaving. It was a dark night, the rain lashed the windows and the office was quite empty. At first, I didn't see the girl enter, then some sixth sense made me glance up. Nancy was there, pale and still, her eyes unusually large. She smiled slightly. "I hope you don't mind—but I had to see you. It's—it's John. . . ."

"I was so happy, the day I talked to you," she began, in a small, tense voice. "Everything seemed so right, so perfect. I had been worried, and now everything was clear. It was the same the next day—today, that is. . . ."

She had started with the morning, she told me of waking to a day of sunshine, of feeling completely happy.

The buoyant feeling persisted as she traveled to work. Nothing seemed irritating or annoying, the world was perfect. Perhaps it was the weather, or her imagination, but everyone seemed brighter, more relaxed. Even the morning crowds seemed less tense, less withdrawn.

As she watched the scene she knew that her vision had little to do with the weather; it was her own happiness that was touching the world about her.

She was walking towards her office when a man left a shop some yards ahead. Nancy stared—and her bubble of happiness vanished. It was the man who had haunted her for the past two days. It was John Paisley, her fiance, or his double. She had to know, to face this man and find the truth.

The street was crowded, but this time she was determined that nothing would stand in her way. As she followed the man seemed to increase his speed. Nancy dodged through the crowd; she could still see the man, and he was still near enough to be caught. He was moving quickly, not running, but walking at what seemed an unusually fast pace. His white raincoat helped to single him out and Nancy kept her eyes fixed on that white coat and followed closely.

Suddenly, the crowd paused on the edge of a road. The man continued his progress. Nancy pushed forward, but it was too late. A truck swept around the corner. There was a scream of brakes, a smell of scorched rubber. The scene seemed to happen in slow motion—so slowly that it seemed possible to prevent it.

She saw the man's arms rise in a hopeless gesture of protection as the truck moved inexorably towards him.

The tragedy was over in less than a minute. In a few seconds a life had ended. Suddenly, the world seemed to come alive. People moved, shouted, pushed. Already a policeman was moving towards the scene. Soon it would be over, all evidence of a commonplace tragedy removed from the streets.

Nancy was still, the horror retaining its hold of her mind and body. The impact of the accident was greater on her because the man she had followed and seen die was her fiance, John Paisley. She knew it with a sudden, bitter certainty. That day had been too bright, her sense of happiness too great. In a curious way, she felt she had known this would be the result of the last few days.

Tears streamed down her face as she moved towards the solemn tableau in the middle of the road. A policeman was covering the body with a blanket but he stepped aside without speaking when he saw her tears. Nancy knelt and gazed at the sprawling body. The man was dead, his eyes open and blank. His hair was gray, his skin wrinkled, he was a man of some 60 years. She stared, and an ecstatic relief flooded through her because she *didn't* know him. . . .

She walked away quickly, her mind racing. She had been so sure, she had *known* the man was John. But the man in the road was a stranger, a total stranger, in no way similar to the man she loved. It must have been a hallucination, a trick of the mind.

For a time she walked without knowing where her steps were taking her. She was still dazed, unsure and almost afraid of the hysterical happenings in her mind. Then she saw she was walking home. She was tired, almost drained, and she felt she had to rest, to try and ease the strange thoughts whirling through her brain.

She opened the gate and walked towards the house. Before she reached the door her mother appeared. There was a slip of yellow paper in her hand. Her face was pale. . . .

Nancy stared as her mother pushed the telegram into her hands. "Deepest regret and sympathy," she read. "John Paisley died today after car crash. Deeply missed. Letter follows."

The telegram fluttered across my desk and I read it slowly. Nancy watched me, her eyes dry and large, masking her grief.

"It's funny," she said. "I shed tears this morning over the death of an unknown man. But was he unknown? You

know, I thought seeing him like that was an illusion. But could it have been more than that? Is it possible that John tried to see me, to warn me, was perhaps thinking about me at the end?"

I paused, choosing my words with care. The girl had been hurt too much, it didn't seem fair that such a young person should have to face this shattering blow.

"Yes, Nancy, it is possible. There are some things about the kind of love some people know. It can defy distance and even death. That kind of love could have been shared by you both."

I sat there for some time after she'd gone. Alone, I thought of her story. An illusion or an omen? A trick of the mind or a defiant act of love? No one could ever say with certainty. I felt there had been some communication, but that Nancy was the only one who could really know.

THE TOMB OF THE ROBBER KNIGHT

When Mrs. Seeley, a widow with one daughter, decided to take a holiday in Wales in 1964, she did not know that she was to uncover a story of robbery and murder.

Nor did she know that she was to help to lay to rest the tormented spirit of a man who had been dead for around 600 years—a man who had done great wrong, and had paid for his sins by his death at the hand of his own brother.

For her holiday, Mrs. Seeley took a flat in a house in the small town of Madocwm. The name of the town has been changed to protect the owner of the house, whose livelihood it is. The house was divided into three flats: two rented seasonally to vacationers and the third, at the time this story took place, let to a young mother and her child.

With Mrs. Seeley went her 18-year-old daughter, Louisa, together with Louisa's friend Tania. In addition, they took with them a number of dogs, the pick of Mrs. Seeley's breeding kennels. It was the most intelligent of these dogs which was to give warning of the terror to come.

At first, it did not strike Mrs. Seeley and the girls as odd that two pleasant flats should be empty at the height of the holiday season, situated as they were in a famous beauty

spot on the fringe of the national park of Snowdonia. They considered themselves lucky to have found such excellent accommodation.

The countryside around Madocwm contained grim reminders of Wales' troubled past. Within a few miles of the house were the crumbling remains of two ancient castles, built in the days of bloody conflict between the fiery Welsh and their English overlords.

For a few days, Mrs. Seeley and the girls basked in the warmth of the late summer sun. The weather and scenery were idyllic. Then, there came a change. Dark clouds lay on the mountain tops, mist filled the valleys, thick fogs rolled in from the sea, from the Druid-haunted island of Anglesey.

The vacationers withdrew into their flat. They lit fires, drew the curtains against the grayness outside, and spent the rest of the day reading. Next morning, the countryside was still blanketed by fog.

The visitors went into the town. But they soon found that the people of Madocwm were not prepared to enter into friendly conversation with them. On their approach, talk shifted into lilting Cymric, the ancient tongue of Wales, and they received dark looks and uneasy glances.

Feeling like outcasts, Mrs. Seeley and the girls returned to their holiday home. They began to grow bored. Reading seemed a tiring occupation. An air of menace seemed to hang around the house, thick as the all-pervading fog.

Weasel, a pedigree spaniel and the favorite among Mrs. Seeley's dogs, grew increasingly uneasy. As the grayness of the day thickened into the darkness of night, she moved around the flat, growling deep in her throat.

When bedtime came, Weasel, who always insisted on sleeping apart from the rest of the dogs—if she could not sleep on her mistresses' bed—refused to take her usual place in a corner of the kitchen. Thinking the animal must be lonely in strange surroundings, Mrs. Seeley left her with the other dogs in the living room. Still, the spaniel showed signs of unrest—of fear.

The girls, Louisa and Tania, had settled down to read in bed in their adjoining rooms. But their reading was interrupted as the electric light gradually began to fade. They had been warned that the supply of power was liable to peter out but this was the only time during their stay that this had actually taken place.

There was, however, a supply of candles in each room. The girls each lit a fair number and continued to read. About fifteen minutes later, Tania called Louisa into her room in a low, frightened voice.

As Louisa entered, she saw her friend's apprehensive face in the faint radiance of the only candle left alight. Then, even that small flame flickered out.

For a moment the two girls remained motionless in the darkness. Both were overwrought by the gloom of the day that had just ended. Then, together, they plucked up the courage to laugh at their fears. The candles, they decided, had simply been blow out by a draft.

Five new candles were lighted. Sitting on Tania's bed, the girls watched in growing fear as, one by one, the flames grew smaller. As if starved of oxygen, they dwindled away into darkness again.

The girls spent the rest of the night huddled together in Louisa's room. No more untoward happenings occurred, but the whole house seemed unnaturally quiet. Even the dogs were silent, as if in fear.

The next day was again gloomy and overcast. During the afternoon Tania, bored with reading and inactivity, suggested they make up an Ouija board. The odd business with the candles was preying on her mind. But whatever ideas the teenaged girl might have had, they could have been nothing like the strange story spelled out by the up-turned wine glass.

As soon as the three were settled around a table, the glass performed several circles on the tabletop before answering "Yes" to the question: "Is anyone there?" For some hours the glass rumbled rapidly around the board. Often it left questions unanswered and sped on, as if intent on telling its story before it could be interrupted.

The troubled spirit they had contacted said his name had been Regglo. He had been the English commander of one of the nearby castles. His spelling of his name, odd though it seemed, he insisted was correct. He was vague over dates, as if he had never really known what years he lived in.

During his life, he had hated the king in London. Even greater had been his hatred of his brother whom he identified as the commander of the other nearby castle. The castles had been built as strongholds against the Irish Raiders who had visited the Welsh coast for plunder and murder.

Again and again the messages were interrupted by a terse and puzzling command: "Light a candle . . . light a candle!" The frequency of this seemingly irrelevant message made complete understanding difficult.

Eventually, Tania took advantage of a halt in the glass's movement to question the meaning of that puzzling sentence. Instantly, the glass rushed on. A candle was needed, ran the message, for the repose of Regglo's soul.

Not only had Regglo hated the king, he had taken up arms against him. He had become a robber baron, breaking the binding oaths of loyalty to his king, a mortal sin, and his knightly oaths to God and man. He had brought terror to the priests, monks and nuns of the surrounding countryside.

It was a catalogue of crimes that, to a man of his time, would doom an unshriven soul to everlasting torment.

Regglo's brother had wisely sided with the king. He had hunted down and captured Regglo. The malcontent took refuge in a church, and it was there that his brother found him. In Regglo's time, no violence could be committed against anyone who took sanctuary in a church.

But the code of sanctuary was violated. Regglo's brother advanced on the hapless renegade who was unarmed as the code dictated, and killed him in the church. His body was buried under the crypt floor.

Great as his own crimes had been, Regglo's spirit was still aghast at his brother's deed. However, Regglo had died without benefit of confession and was barred from heaven. To set his soul at rest, he needed a candle to be lit to his memory, in a Catholic church, and a mass said for his soul.

When the glass ceased moving, the three sat in silence for a long while. Finally, one of them asked in which church Regglo had been killed. The answer startled them. "Here!" said the glass and stopped. It refused to answer any more questions and the seance was over.

That night, both girls were shocked into wakefulness by a curious metallic scraping sound. It seemed to come from somewhere beneath Louisa's room which they now shared. At first, both thought some animal was disturbing the dustbins outside, but the sound was too loud for a prowling fox or cat.

Frightened, the girls woke Mrs. Seeley. All three listened as the sounds appeared to circle the house several times

before stopping. A fearful silence—then bedlam! Every dog in their assorted pack howled or barked. They refused to be comforted and continued their hysterical chorus for what seemed hours.

After a long discussion, during which Tania suggested, hesitantly, that the sounds resembled the tread of a man in armor, they eventually got a little sleep.

The mist and fog had cleared when they awoke, but they could hardly forget the events of the previous night. They drove into Madocwm and busied themselves in the local library, expecting to confirm Regglo's story in local records.

Their researches were disappointing. They could find no mention of a renegade knight called Regglo, nor of any of the events he had described.

One item, however, surprised and excited them. A copy of an ancient map, whose original was in Cardiff Museum, showed that in the late 14th century a church had stood somewhere near the spot now occupied by their holiday house. It had been burned down early in the 15th century. This, at least, helped to place Regglo in the right period.

That night, they made plans to search for any visible remains of the church on the next day. They waited, tense, for a repetition of the weird metallic sounds that had terrified the dogs on the previous night. A hesitant knock on their door held them in their chairs for a moment of speechless fright. But it was the young mother, the only other tenant in the house, who lived in the basement.

It was obvious that she was in a state of extreme nervous tension. Mrs. Seeley thought that she was near to a nervous breakdown.

At first, their visitor seemed uncertain of what to say. Then she launched into a hesitant appeal for company.

She complained of the house's isolation and of the absence of her husband. She mentioned that she was often frightened after dark. This fear so exactly tied up with their own feelings that Mrs. Seeley asked if she thought there might be anything wrong with the house.

"Wrong!" exclaimed the girl. "It's a fearful place. I keep telling my husband I want to leave, but he says I'm too imaginative." What made it fearful? Unexplained noises at night. Odd metallic scrapings and sometimes the sound of men's voices. A puppy she had bought to keep her company

had been found dead without a mark on it within weeks of arriving in her basement home.

They asked whether she had heard anything frightening within the last week. Last night, she said, had been one of the worst so far. She had heard footsteps and low voices from the other side of her wall.

Couldn't the voices she had heard be illicit visitors to the neighboring basement flat? "No!" she said. The wall through which she heard the frightening sounds was, the landlady had assured her, merely part of the foundations. There was nothing on the other side of the wall but earth.

She had heard the noises so often that she had even rapped the wall to prove to herself that it was solid—and had been shocked to find that it was not! At one point it sounded hollow.

They sat up talking for some hours, but forebore to mention their own experiences. It seemed kinder to let her imagine some kind of illicit activity in a secret room than to hint at what might really have caused the disturbance.

The following morning, all three went down to the basement and tapped the wall at the point she indicated. A hollow note came back to them. Outside, Louisa noticed that the front doorstep was unusually high.

On closer inspection, they found that the riser, at right angles to the tread, was made of a single block of granite, separate from the steps. Half an hour's work with a crowbar pried it loose.

Underneath, with the aid of a torch, they saw a flight of steps. At the bottom, just visible as they craned through the narrow opening, were the rotted remains of a door. Beyond stretched the sanded floor of a vast underground chamber.

It was completely empty and the sand was, ominously, undisturbed. Whatever caused the noises that had so frightened them all, had made no mark in the receptive surface of the floor.

As they drew back in silent puzzlement, they noticed the stones that made up the sides of the descending stairway and the visible part of the chamber walls. They were huge and ancient, undoubtedly medieval.

Slowly, truth dawned. Soon, they found added confirmation. The house was surrounded by a long, low mound, nowhere more than 10 inches high. It formed a familiar shape—the pattern of a cross, typical of all old Christian churches.

The church of which Regglo had spoken, the church they had seen on the old map, provided the foundations of the house in which they were living! Regglo lay buried a little way beneath their feet, approximately where they had heard the curious metallic tread.

It was impossible fully to investigate the underground chamber, which had once been the crypt of the church, without the permission of the owner. Permission was obviously not forthcoming when the landlady learned that her only permanent tenant, the young mother, would move out on that very day.

It had been impossible to conceal the significance of the hidden crypt from the girl. Also, an incautious reference to Regglo brought the whole story out. It was enough. She packed up and left.

The landlady obstinately refused to believe that her house was built on the foundations of an ancient church. She threatened to sue for malicious libel when told that they believed the house to be haunted! It seemed obvious she knew well enough of some kind of trouble associated with her house, and hoped to quash any rumors before they could properly begin. The house, after all, was her main livelihood.

As for the troubled soul of Regglo, his contemporary compatriots did their best by him. Tania, who was in fact a Roman Catholic and therefore followed the same form of worship as did Regglo, lit a candle in a nearby church and caused a mass to be said for his soul.

For the first few nights after that there were irregular noises after dark, causing the dogs to howl and whine uncertainly, then peace descended on the house on the hill.

On the last night before they left a little over a week later, the three tried another seance. They wrote out the cards and placed a tumbler in position. Nothing stirred. Though they waited for half an hour no presence reached out to make itself known. Regglo, the traitor, the robber, the iconoclast, was no more within their ken.

THE SECRET OF THE GREAT BUOY

By the spring of 1875, many of the fishermen all along the northeast coast of Scotland, knew that the Glendough Buoy, near Hoy Harbor, was something to be avoided. It wasn't just that it marked a treacherous reef. It was because of the strange and terrifying sight that had been seen there one February night, by the crew of the fishing vessel, *Braemar*.

It had been a misty night, with visibility down to no more than fifty yards. Every man was on deck and straining his ears for the sound of the Glendough Buoy which would tell them they were on course, and near the narrow channel leading to the harbor of Hoy.

Eventually they heard the bell; the deep, melancholy notes echoing out over the water. But they heard something else too—something that made every man peer through the murky fog intently. For mingling with the booming of the bell were the distressed cries of a human being—high pitched cries, hysterical cries, the cries of a woman. They came from exactly the direction of the buoy.

Captain Macdonald ordered the bosun to reduce speed and to head for the buoy, while the crew prepared to throw lines and launch the lifeboat. For a long time they could see nothing, but all the while they could hear the screams, partly muffled by the sonorous clanging of that bell. It was an eerie experience, that journey into the unknown.

The *Braemar* was no more than fifty yards from the great metal buoy and the Captain and some of the crew were scanning the water, expecting to see an upturned boat or a drifting dinghy, but there was nothing to be seen—at first.

Then, with horror, the seamen saw a woman, clinging desperately to the top of the buoy, calling out to them to rescue her.

With its huge bell mounted into a cage at the top, the Glendough Buoy towered at least twenty feet out of the water. Its green slimy sides rose smooth and unbroken from the sea and the crew wondered how this woman had climbed to the bell cage.

Then, as the *Braemar* inched nearer, a sense of revulsion swept over the fishermen, for it was not a living woman but a skeleton with long, black hair flowing down along the shreds of clothing that remained clinging to the bones.

Every man on board was so transfixed with terror that, had not Captain Macdonald kept his senses sufficiently to tell them to get to the rigging and bring the boat about, they would have rammed the bell-buoy. As it was, they swept past with only inches to spare, and the spectre disappeared from view.

The final horror came when the *Braemar* came slowly around the buoy again. For the hideous sight, which every man had seen, had vanished.

Few people believed Captain Macdonald or his men when the incredible story was related on the following day. Most of their friends thought that they had seen a large white sea bird which, enshrouded by mist, had created this strange illusion. But Macdonald was quite adamant that he had seen what he claimed and that every man on the boat had seen it also. He had no doubt that it had been a skeleton. Besides, there had been the cries they heard, too. They were all veteran fishermen who could certainly have told the difference between a screaming sea gull and a terrified woman!

A few days later, another vessel sailed into Hoy Harbor. The crew had not heard of Captain Macdonald's report, but they too spoke of the skeleton with long hair and flowing robes that had lured them through the darkness towards the Glendough Buoy.

Soon, so many seamen claimed to have seen and heard the frightening apparition, that most of the local fishermen refused to go anywhere near the buoy. They preferred to take the longer and infinitely more dangerous northern approach to the harbor mouth. The few who did sail past that spot, did so only with their eyes averted and refused to listen to any sounds. The buoy was haunted and they were terrified of it.

Yet no one wondered *why* the apparition had suddenly started to appear, or whose ghost it could be.

Certainly no one connected the manifestation with the mysterious disappearance of the young wife of Angus McBride, a brawny and quick-tempered fisherman from the neighboring village of Kilcagrow.

Angus had only been married to Maggie for eight months

when she suddenly disappeared. According to Angus they had a quarrel, but it had been nothing serious. Maggie, however, had fled from their small cottage in a temper and had never been seen again.

Later that night Angus had gone out looking for her, searching the cliffs and the beach, but when he found no trace of her, he assumed that she had walked the four miles to Garry Head where her parents lived. It wasn't until the following morning he found that her parents had not seen her for several days.

During the search that followed, one of Maggie's shoes was found on a narrow path which lead from the cottage down to the beach.

After almost a week, the search party found no further trace of the missing woman and, although Angus was questioned at length, his own obvious grief and keen desire to find his wife, allayed any suspicions that he could have been in any way responsible for her disappearance.

As the months went by, the rumors and the speculation began to grow. People began to whisper that Maggie had had a lover—a man who had courted her from Garry Head, before meeting and marrying Angus. Others spoke of the terrible threats they had heard Angus shouting at his wife; but just as many people condemned such stories as malicious gossip. Angus and Maggie had been a devoted couple, they said.

Then, during a storm late one night a few months later, a Danish trawler skipper pulled into Glendough Bay and anchored within sound of the buoy. The skipper, Frederick Jelman, had heard nothing about the haunted bell-buoy, or the missing woman.

A few hours after midnight one of the men on the night watch burst into Jelman's cabin to say that he had heard cries coming from the direction of the buoy.

Jelman followed the man on deck and despite the sound of the wind and the lashing rain, he could clearly hear the unmistakable cry of a woman's voice.

Captain Jelman ordered a lifeboat to be lowered, then with five of his men, he rowed through the mountainous seas towards the sound of the crying and the ceaselessly tolling bell.

From about twenty yards away, the seamen could make out the dim shape of the buoy as it rose and fell with the

turbulent waves and on top, dressed in white, they could see a woman.

Even as he watched, Jelman knew that the entire situation was beyond the bounds of credibility, and it was with a feeling of unreality that he raised the hailer to his lips to call to the woman.

Visibility was very bad and all that Jelman could see was the white of her bones, the vague outline of her head and her long hair blowing in the wind.

Shouting above the gale, he told her that it would be too dangerous for the boat to come alongside the buoy. But he instructed her to jump into the sea and they would pick her up. She paid no attention to his instructions but continued to wail. Then Captain Jelman heard her words: "I am the wife of Angus McBride and I curse him. . . .!" She then vanished.

The storm had passed by morning and it was with a troubled mind that Captain Jelman sailed into Hoy. Although he was not a superstitious man, he was convinced that on the previous night he had seen a ghost. Moreover, the same spectre had been seen by five of his crew.

Jelman went to the village church to tell Reverend Berkeley about the manifestation. The padre knew of the reports only too well and his own theory was that it was no ghost, but a large sea bird that the fishermen kept seeing.

But obviously Jelman could not have heard the story from anyone else, so the padre listened with interest to the Danish skipper's report which was identical to all the others.

Captain Jelman added, "Just before the woman disappeared, she called out, 'I am the wife of Angus McBride and I curse him . . . !'" And he was surprised to see the padre's sudden, horrified expression.

Two days later, a coastguard patrol brought the buoy into harbor at the padre's request, and a crowd of frightened villagers stood on the quay watching in awesome silence.

It took nearly two hours to remove the bolts and to pry open the hatch leading to the bell cage, but once this was accomplished, the padre looked inside and found a corpse.

It did not take long to identify the skeleton as the remains of Maggie McBride. Although the flesh had almost decomposed, remnants of her clothing were easily recognizable and one shoe was missing from the feet.

This grim discovery led to a renewed hunt for the killer.

Angus was questioned again and again, but kept to his original story. The mystery remained a mystery.

On the first day of June, 1875, Maggie McBride was buried in the Kirk at Garry Head. By then Captain Jelman had returned to Denmark and the secret of Maggie's curse went with him. The only other man who knew about it was the Reverend Berkeley and his plan was to wait—and watch. . . .

Three days later, Angus McBride committed suicide by throwing himself from the cliff top. A document was found in his cottage which explained in detail how he had killed his wife, and how he had hidden her battered body in the great buoy which had been in Hoy Harbor for a few days for repairs. He had borrowed a boat to tow it back out to its berth the following morning. And only McBride—and the corpse—knew of the gruesome secret which he thought was well hidden there.

THE SINGER AND THE SONG

Westmorland is a wild county, strangely remote from the rest of Britain, known by name, but little else. A thousand years ago it was very much as it is today—the hills still reared to the bare sky, there were still mysterious lakes, the wind was still warm from the west.

Thirty years ago, Michael Chapman visited the county on a holiday. He was a gifted musician with a particular talent for teaching. His reputation was international and his classes were attended by many fashionable musicians. The holiday was a means of escaping from the demands of his life, of isolating himself from the world in order to find peace. And in Westmorland he hoped to find the calm and isolation that he needed.

During the second week of his tour he was walking towards Kendal. The day was hot and still, one of those rare golden days when the sun seemed poised in the sky forever and a busy brook bounced down the hillside and chattered its way to a broad stream which ran across the valley. It was a moment of peace, a time of tranquillity.

He paused there—and then heard something, a sound

that seemed at first to come from his own imagination. It was a woman's voice, deep and clear, the tone flawless as a diamond.

Then he climbed the rise and saw the singer. She was a girl in a blue cotton dress who was filling a pail of water from the stream. Her hair was dark, long and touching the water. She was slim and young and, as she worked, she sang.

Chapman hurried forward. The girl seemed to sense rather than hear him. She turned, her eyes wide and startled. He had an immediate impression of youth and beauty combined in a striking way, of dark eyes and skin golden and smooth. As he came closer she moved back, and then turned sharply running into the distance.

He watched her go. He had heard the greatest singers in the world, he loved the sound of the human voice, but this one had exerted a unique effect on him. He knew, quite suddenly, that her voice was like no other he had ever heard.

He saw her disappearing into a large gray house huddled against the shoulder of a hill.

There was no sign of life when he reached there and after he knocked there was a long silence. At last, the door opened and a tall woman with dark hair streaked with gray appeared. Her manner was cold and distant. Quickly Chapman explained what he heard, a girl singing, he was interested in the voice, he would like to hear her sing again.

The woman was abrupt. There would be no singing by anyone in her house; he was mistaken; she was busy. As she began to close the door Chapman insisted. He explained that he was a teacher of music, and his only interest was in the voice. There was no point in denying what he had seen and heard.

The woman repeated that he was mistaken but then the girl appeared and looked at Chapman calmly, "It's all right, mother. He knows, he heard me. I'm sorry. . . ."

The girl's mother was startled and closed the door, leaving Chapman alone. He hesitated, embarrassed and curious. It was puzzling, even ridiculous. Why should anyone be so mysterious about the simple fact of a girl singing?

He could hear voices in the house, but although he could not distinguish what they were saying, it seemed he had come across some family quarrel and he was certain he wouldn't be welcome. As he began to turn away the door opened again and a voice called.

The girl and her mother were standing in the doorway. Chapman returned and the girl apologized for the way he had been greeted. It was a family affair, nothing to do with him personally. Chapman was impressed by her manner and her maturity, even though she was obviously young. He explained that he had heard her singing and would like to know more about her. Had she been trained, how long had she been singing, had she thought of a career in music?

Her name was Irene Blake; she was 18 and had lived in the same house for the whole of her life. She had never been trained in singing, never thought of a career in singing and, in fact, had never sung in public.

Chapman explained his qualifications as a teacher and said that he was willing to take her to London to teach her and to support her, until she made a public performance. He pointed out that it was a gamble, but one he was only too willing to take. The decision was hers and that of her family.

The girl hesitated and looked at her mother who looked away, her mouth tight, her eyes anxious. Chapman realized that the mother was against the idea—more, she seemed against the idea of the girl singing at all. Then the girl smiled with a sudden warmth and looked younger than previously.

"Yes, I'd like that very much—if you're prepared to take the chance then I am."

Chapman made the arrangements quickly. He contacted London and arranged accommodation in his sister's home. He also called his secretary and told her to expect him earlier than arranged. Suddenly, he didn't want a holiday. He felt elated, refreshed, on the verge of a great new challenge. After hiring a car he returned to the gray house on the hill.

Irene was waiting with her mother and she was excited in a subdued sort of way. Her mother was distant, aloof. He felt a pang of sympathy for her and tried to assure her that Irene would do well, she would be cared for and that she would visit her mother as often as she wished. Mrs. Blake looked at him stonily and there was resignation in her voice when she replied with words he was to remember for the rest of his life: "You don't understand; you couldn't even if I tried to explain. It's enough that Irene wants this, even if it leads to sorrow . . . which it will."

Once in London the training began and Chapman found

Irene a good pupil. Along with her amazing natural ability she had enthusiasm and dedication. After a few weeks, her enthusiasm remained at as high a level and Chapman began to wonder if he was forcing her too fast. But she would not relax, she felt that it was important for her to learn as much as possible. So much time had been wasted, and she had to catch up, to become as good as possible.

Her natural voice was so remarkable that training only proved useful in learning new works. Chapman accepted the fact that the girl had a unique musical talent and that he, as a teacher, had a minor role to play. He could teach her technique, but nature had given her the quality she had.

For her first recital he chose a small hall and invited two or three critics to come along and hear his new discovery. Irene was well prepared but he took great care to see that nerves didn't destroy her confidence.

The recital was not very well attended, but that was hardly surprising with an unknown name. The main thing, as Chapman said, was that the opinion of even a single critic could have important implications. It was essential that she gave of her best, of her maximum ability.

As Irene moved onstage, he was impressed by her poise. She had a kind of natural elegance; her grace was not that of a trained model, but of someone with natural dignity.

She began to sing and her remarkable voice filled the hall. Again the main impression on the listener was one of sadness, of a deep, primeval longing. The sadness was not merely human, not just about love or even death, but went much further—it seemed concerned with the core of existence with the beginning and eventual end of the Earth.

Chapman was again impressed; although he had heard her voice every day, at each hearing it seemed to show some new facet of life. He realized she had captured the audience—there was a kind of intense stillness, an engrossed attention that is only seen when a performer is in complete command.

She ended her recital and for a second there was no applause. But then they seemed to shake free of the music. They clapped, cheered and then rose in a spontaneous tribute. Even Chapman, who had seen many first performances, was moved. Irene Blake stood and let the applause surround her, she smiled and it seemed as if she was smiling at each person in the audience individually.

When it was over and they were backstage, there was no

need for anything to be said. The voice Chapman had heard in the hill country of Westmorland had begun its conquest of London.

The next day the notices appeared. There were more ecstatic ones than could have been expected. This, they declared with unusual unanimity, was greatness, all the more surprising because it was found in one so young. They loved her voice, her tone, her technique and were charmed by her presence.

From that moment success was assured. It is only once in a lifetime—if as often—that a really superb voice is heard. Every concert hall in London wanted to hear this new discovery. There were so many offers that Chapman began to worry that the pressure on Irene would be too great. But when he suggested resting, she was adamant that this was why she had come to London—singing gave her pleasure, it didn't tire her, it refreshed her. In the face of such enthusiasm, he had to agree and it did seem that she was physically capable of the heavy program.

The pleasing thing was that her growing reputation had made no difference to Irene Blake. She remained what she had been on her first day—a fresh, pleasant girl with a ready sense of humor. Indeed, it was this gaiety that surprised many people who met her, for her singing voice always had an air of deep compelling sadness.

One evening before a performance, Chapman called to see Irene to discuss her program. She was apparently engrossed before the dressing room mirror and didn't see him enter. He stopped surprised and alarmed to see steady streams of tears spilling from her eyes—she was weeping but without a sound.

Seeing him she brushed the tears away and smiled readily but Chapman was anxious and asked if she was ill.

Irene shook her head. The tears, she said, were those of happiness. She was crying because she was contented—because everything had been so worthwhile.

As always, Chapman was unable to argue with her. And the concert went off with the success he had come to expect. Yet he was worried. He began to watch her closely and over the next weeks believed he detected signs of strain; odd moments when Irene was alone and suddenly seemed vulnerable and tired. But the next moment she would be herself, alert and vital, infectiously gay.

Then, just when he was deciding to cancel some of her

engagements, she was invited to give a charity performance at the Albert Hall. It would be a special recital, devoted to the work of one artist.

Irene was thrilled when she heard the news, but Chapman argued that she had been working too hard and that they could postpone the concert. She must have a holiday and when she returned there would be more offers.

Irene had one question—was she singing badly, below her best? Chapman had to admit that she wasn't. If anything he assured her, she was in better voice than ever before.

That was all Irene wanted to know and she pointed out that it was an opportunity to sing to more people at one time than she had ever had—that was important, to reach out, to share whatever gift she had with as many people as possible.

It was an argument Chapman had heard from her before, and one he had to accept. Weeks before her performance all available tickets had been sold. It was an unprecedented success, to attract such a following in so short a time.

In the days before the concert, Irene seemed to have even greater vitality. She worked and sang and seemed to live every moment of life at a high level.

The night of the concert Chapman made his now usual visit to Irene's dressing room. She was quieter than usual, rather subdued. They chatted pleasantly until it was time for her to make up. Before he left Irene, she took his hand. She smiled and he remembered her next words for many years: "Thank you for letting me do all this. I want you to know—it has been wonderful, all of it. I wouldn't change anything."

As she began to sing that evening, Chapman listened and wondered again at the quality and the intensity of her voice.

Suddenly, he glanced up and saw Irene's mother. Surprised, he went towards her.

"Mrs. Blake—this will be a wonderful surprise! As soon as she comes off stage, I'll tell Irene you're here. . . ."

Shaking her head and with a strange weariness the woman said, "She'll know I'm here. I've come because she'll need me."

Chapman stared at her, puzzled and disturbed. There was something somber about her appearance, almost as if she was in mourning. He began to speak when Irene's voice,

which could be heard from the stage above, faltered. There was a rustle of concern from the audience—then the voice stopped abruptly.

Chapman turned, ran up to the stage and thrust himself through a crowd of people as the curtain began to descend. Irene was on the floor of the stage, her face white and her eyes dark with pain. He picked her up and ran to the dressing room.

As he put her on a couch her eyes flickered open. She smiled and held his hands. She was breathing deeply. Chapman stammered that everything would be all right, she'd been working too hard, it was his fault, no one else could be blamed. He remembered her mother and told the girl. She nodded, as if it came as no surprise, and asked him to send her in. Before he left, she held his hand and told him to remember that nothing could be changed, what had to happen had to happen. . . .

The door opened and her mother appeared. He moved towards the door, but she shook her head. "It's over, Mr. Chapman. She's gone . . . nothing could be done. . . ."

He stared at her. It didn't make sense. Then she led him outside. In that moment, she seemed a woman of immense poise and courage.

She explained that she traveled to see her daughter in her time of need. She had also been against the move to London and the singing career. Was it all because of some illness he had known nothing about?

Mrs. Blake hesitated and then shook her head. The only reason she was telling him was because Irene had asked that she should. According to the girl, he had given her great happiness. The old woman spoke softly—if he had given so much to her daughter, she could only respect and thank him for it. The story she was going to tell, she said, would seem strange, and it was. But it was true—and it might explain many things. . . .

Her family had a long history in their part of Westmorland. They had been rich at best and comfortable at worst. But they had a secret tragedy—a tragedy that followed every generation. Every so often a girl child was born and discovered to have a beautiful voice. That fact concealed the tragedy, for those born with a beautiful voice died early. Each one had a wasting disease; it was always so. . . .

The old woman finished the story and repeated Irene's

message that Chapman was not to blame himself, that it had all been worthwhile. With that she left.

It was impossible for him to accept the woman's story—or it would be impossible for anyone else. And yet, everything she had said had a basis of truth, and fitted the facts he knew. He would never know with certainty—the only certainty was that he had heard a magnificent voice and that voice was stilled.

And that fact brought both sorrow and joy.

THE GHOST THAT GREW OLD

Harry Lewis was only nine at the time and, of course, no one believed him—least of all his brother Gerald, who was four years older and who told Harry that he must have imagined it all. For even then, Gerald didn't believe in ghosts.

Harry got much the same reaction from the people who lived on the floors above and below his family's flat in Mansett Street, in north London. After all, they'd been living in the house for thirty years or more and had never seen anything.

Only kindly old Mrs. Munns on the ground floor had suggested that it could have been a trick of the light and didn't even hint that what Harry said was an outright lie. Light plays funny tricks on the staircases of these old Victorian houses, she told him, particularly on a winter's morning.

Harry knew otherwise. The ghost had been so clear, he knew it was not imagination. And none of the skeptics had been able to explain the fresh rose petals scattered on the staircase.

And what about the tiny medallion he had found among the flowers, with the two names "Rosemary" and "Lionel" and the date "1851" engraved on it? Who could have dropped it there, he wondered?

"It's one of your tricks," Harry's mother had told him impatiently. "You must've got those flowers from the dust-bin."

So Harry gave up. He should have realized that adults automatically disbelieved what children said, even if it was the truth but couldn't be proved.

None of them had bothered to wonder how rose petals could possibly be found, still fresh, in the middle of January, 1937; no flowers had bloomed for months in the gardens behind the houses and, in any case, no one in the area could have afforded to buy hothouse roses, let alone throw them away.

Harry sat at the foot of the stairs, just by the spot where, the morning before, he had seen the wraith-like, almost transparent figure of a young girl hovering above the landing. He wasn't afraid. After all, it had been a beautiful sort of ghost, somehow more sad than frightening.

It had been about eight o'clock and Harry had been coming out of the kitchen on his way to school. It had been cold on the stairs, he remembers that to this day, and he had started to leap down them two at a time. He was only about halfway down when he saw her, and he knew at once that she couldn't possibly have been real.

She wore a wide-skirted, ankle-length dress with little flowers all over it: her hair was parted in the middle, with little bunches at the sides as though she had placed something over her ears and brushed her long hair smoothly over it. No one dressed like that would have been seen in 1937. Harry knew from the history books that this was the sort of dress women had worn in Victorian times.

She seemed to be looking straight at him. He had noticed how sad her eyes were, how she swayed from side to side as though in the grip of some terrible sorrow.

Slowly, the vision had faded, leaving behind at the last, a very faint luminous glow and then—nothing.

Harry wanted to shout out, to call someone, but he couldn't speak. After a few seconds, he felt calmer and slowly sat down on the stairs.

His hand touched something moist and velvety and, looking down, he saw that it was a rose petal, still fresh and pink as though the flower had been picked only a few hours before.

Glancing down the stairs, he had seen a whole trail of them and then a voice interrupted his thoughts.

"What on earth are you doing there?" It was his mother standing at the kitchen door, looking up at him. "Hurry up, you'll catch your death of cold."

Harry stood up, shrugged his schoolbag onto his back and walked slowly downstairs. Kissed his mother and went off to school.

As he walked down the next flight of stairs, Harry put his hand in his pocket. His fingers closed over the medallion. That was real enough, he thought. Perhaps he'd show it to Mr. More, his history teacher.

Suddenly, as he turned the corner on the next landing, Harry felt terribly tired, so tired that his knees began to buckle underneath him. Even his arms seemed to have lost their strength and hung limply by his sides.

Then, just as suddenly, he felt himself gently lifted up and saw to his amazement that the stairs were passing by underneath him—and yet, he *knew* he was not moving his legs. Harry felt himself floating down and down, but could not feel any hands supporting him.

He found himself on his feet again, the tiredness gone, and saw the front door of the house open in front of him. Somehow, he had traveled down two complete flights of stairs.

"Anything the matter?" said a kindly voice. It was Mr. More, who lived only three houses away, but Harry only shook his head silently.

They walked along the road together and eventually Harry drew the medallion from his pocket and gave it to Mr. More.

"Where did you get this, Harry?"

Harry told him, but said nothing about the ghost. He liked Mr. More, but he was, after all, an adult and Harry had had enough of adults telling him that he had an over-worked imagination.

"Very interesting," the history master murmured as he peered through his spectacles at the medallion. "You know, I think it could be genuine. There're lots of things in these old houses, small things left behind by people who lived here when they were first built. They used to be grand Victorian mansions once, you know . . . all the gentry lived here when the area was fashionable and when north London was still virtually countryside."

That, for the while at least, was the end of the matter. For a month or so, Harry watched out for the ghost every time he went up the stairs, but he never saw her.

The memory of what he had seen gradually faded, until Harry hardly thought about it at all. He even forgot that the medallion was lying in a drawer in his bedroom. But, occasionally, he would find it there again, take it out, look at it and wonder.

Two years later, when the Second World War broke out, his family moved away from London to Leicester. When they returned home after the war, Mansett Street had been badly damaged by bombs. Most of the houses were just gaunt piles of splintered wood, surrounded with lumps of masonry and overgrown with weeds.

Harry was 17 by then and the family found another house nearby. Occasionally, somebody remembered Harry's ghost story, and when they did, it would become a huge joke.

Harry remembered too, though to him it was no joke. Every day as he walked to the jeweler's shop where he worked as an apprentice, he passed by the street where it had all happened. He still had the medallion and often took it out of the drawer to read the names engraved there and wonder who Rosemary and Lionel had been; and what had happened to them nearly a hundred years earlier.

Then, one day in the summer of 1946, he heard that the derelict shells of the old houses in Mansett Street were to be pulled down and a block of flats built in their place.

He was surprised at the sadness he felt, for it was as if some much-loved possession was being destroyed. Yet he'd never particularly liked the gloomy old house when he'd lived there.

On the next Saturday afternoon, Harry went back to Mansett Street and to what remained of number nine. Carefully, he picked his way through the rubble, idly kicking aside a few small stones that lay on what he recognized as the patterned stone of the old entrance hall.

He knelt down and smoothed away the dust with his hands. He could see where the staircase had begun, by the few blackened pieces of wood.

Then, for no reason he could fathom, he began to lift aside the pieces of wood until he saw something glint in the sunshine. It was a small box, so dusty and dirty that it was almost indistinguishable from the black wood that had covered it.

Harry dusted it carefully, then opened the lid to see a few yellowed pieces of paper inside. Gently, he unfolded the sheets, to reveal lines of spidery, faded handwriting. The date on the letter was September 27th, 1851.

Quickly, he read; "Dearest mother, Rosemary died last night. So young, so lovely, but the doctors could do nothing to save her. Even now, with my heart full of grief, I can be

glad that she came to Mansett Street that one time, on the day we were married. She looked forward so much to living there herself, to being mistress of a fine mansion. She was thinking of the house as she died, it seems. She told me she wanted to grow old there."

Harry stopped reading. Carefully, but with trembling fingers, he turned over the page, to see the signature at the end: "Lionel."

His thoughts flew back to that January morning nine years before, to the sorrowful figure above the stairs, to the bouquet—the bridal bouquet. Suddenly, all that he had seen fitted into place. He sensed a chill in the atmosphere and, when he looked up, there, silhouetted against the fractured walls of the bombed-out house, was a figure. A misty form which slowly materialized into something he had seen before. The Victorian dress with its wide skirt and scattering of flowers.

The figure was hovering just where the old staircase must have been and as Harry gazed upwards, shading his hand against the sunlight, he saw quite clearly that the smooth, young face of the ghost of nine years before, was now old. It wasn't ugly, or even lined, just mature and calm, with smiling eyes and the same delicate mouth the woman must have had in her youth.

Harry looked down at the letter, still lying open in his hand. Slowly, he folded it again, carefully replaced it in the box and closed it.

As he closed the lid, he felt glad that Rosemary had had her wish.

THE NIGHT OF THE BLIZZARD

The snowdrifts he plunged through from time to time were often higher than his waist. And the sub-zero temperatures, as well as the gale-force wind that came screaming down from the mountain peaks numbed his bones beneath the heavy clothing. The tears the wind brought to his eyes threatened to freeze with the cold at any second, but John Chamberlin stubbornly refused to turn back to the comparative safety of the bus he had left behind in the mountain pass.

Perhaps this was because he was determined to bring a rescue party back to the blizzard beleaguered passengers there; or perhaps it was because he had long since passed the point of no return. For he had been fighting his way through that snowstorm for over six hours, trying to reach the nearest village of Oscanoro, but for all the good he had achieved he might as well have been walking in circles.

The distant lights of the village had been visible for several hours, because whenever the wind slackened and the snow lightened he could see them tantalizingly close. Less than a few miles further up the mountain road, but that was always where they seemed to remain. . . .

Suddenly, Chamberlin did see a light coming nearer—several lamps, in fact, and there were voices. Before he could even shout a large, black shadow lumbered through the white darkness that had surrounded him for so long and he collapsed thankfully into a pair of strong arms. A miracle had happened, he thought, the rescue party was on its way.

He was so breathless as the first man to reach him thrust a flask of cognac between his benumbed lips that he couldn't speak until the hot spirit revived him. Then a voice asked him if he was the Englishman, Chamberlin. He nodded. "You'll be glad to know, then, that your driver got through to safety, sir. He arrived in Oscanoro over an hour ago."

Several of the rescuers carried Chamberlin back to the village, while the main party pushed on to reach the bus. The Englishman was so worn out that it wasn't until he was in the hospital that the significance of these words slammed home to him. For what he had heard was impossible—Pietro Rossi couldn't have reached Oscanoro. That would have been simply impossible. . . .

The story that Chamberlin later related to me sounded incredible, too. It was the sort of thing for which there can be no logical explanation—yet all the facts are there. An adventure that was truly stranger than fiction had actually happened, when a dead man pulled off a miracle.

Chamberlin, who had served throughout the entire Italian campaign with the British army, had made particularly strong friends with a group of Italian partisans who had fought the Fascist government troops from the mountains of northern Italy. Three years after his service discharge, he had returned, to spend a Christmas holiday with his former comrades in arms. That December, 1947, marked the worst winter northern Italy had witnessed for over half a century,

but the blizzards appeared to be dying away the morning Chamberlin arrived at Pontebba, the nearest railroad junction for Oscanoro.

Thus, in his haste to reach the village in time for Christmas Eve, he had ignored the warnings of the local people and booked a passage on a bus that was trying to reach Oscanoro before the blizzards started again. Apart from himself and the driver, most of the other passengers were schoolchildren and a few housewives, who had been separated from their families for over a week because of the weather. The driver was Pietro Rossi, a former partisan, who had also known Chamberlin during the campaign.

The bus left Pontebba just after dawn on the morning of the 23rd. The sky was clear and the weather deceptively calm, but after the first few hours of what was normally an eight hour trip the bus suddenly slid to the side of the road and rammed down a slight incline into a snowdrift.

Rossi had run into this sort of obstacle before, he assured Chamberlin and the nervous children. In the past he had always managed to back the vehicle out and push on, but this time it was different. This time the wheels just churned around on the frozen road and went nowhere.

Time ticked relentlessly past, as the bus waited there helplessly, hoping that some other vehicles would come past. Pietro assured his passengers that the army—the Alpine Regiments—were maintaining regular patrols in the mountains.

Two hours later, the first pangs of fear began to sweep through the bus. For the sky was rapidly piling up with ominously heavy looking clouds, the wind was rising, and a sharp coldness was beginning to penetrate the interior of the bus. The latter, at least, was something the driver could cope with, for there was sufficient fuel in the tank to allow him to keep the engine running and thus keep the heater operating. So long as the bus was warm, nobody would worry too much. It was when that stopped and the cold returned that the fear could really get to work. Gradually, too, both Chamberlin and Pietro discussed something together, something they had both realized.

As the telephone cables between Pontebba and Oscanoro were known to have been damaged, there was the chance that nobody in the village would know that the bus had left the town. Nobody would be expecting them there; nobody in Pontebba would worry unduly when the bus didn't

return, either. At least, they wouldn't until the following morning, and by then it would be too late. The first large flakes of the snow started to flutter down at that point. Within minutes the blizzard was raging about them.

Then, as the darkness came and the blizzard moaned even louder about the stranded bus, the children began to cry. Rossi and Chamberline both reached the same decision: somebody would have to fetch help. There was no sense in trying to get back to Pontebba, for they had passed the point of no return. Whoever left would have to make for Oscanoro, which lay some miles immediately ahead up the road, or—take a risk and make for a farmhouse that lay down a side road nearby. Oscanoro was nearer, but the road to the farm was more sheltered. The only problem Pietro could see there was that there was no guarantee anybody would be at the farm.

Finally, it was suggested that both men should go, leaving the children in the care of the women. With Chamberlin trying to reach Oscanoro, Rossi would head for the farm. Of course, the Italian pointed out, they could both perish, but at least the chance was 100 per cent better, if two attempts were made.

So, wearing all the clothing that they could, and all that the women passengers could spare, they stepped out into the storm. It was even worse than it seemed from the comparative safety and comfort of the bus. It took them almost an hour before they reached the parting of the ways. But there was neither the time nor the inclination for farewells. Pietro waved briefly and swung away from the road and was soon lost in the blizzard, and Chamberlin tried to keep on the road.

For Chamberlin, that trip along the snowbound mountain road was a nightmare journey into an unknown, endless limbo. Hours after leaving that bus, stumbling through snowdrifts and slithering into icy ditches, he was still nowhere near his destination, Oscanoro.

Then suddenly, through a lull in the storm, high above him, where the road curved round the hillside, he glimpsed the distant lights of the village. But they remained tantalizingly out of reach for what seemed like eternity.

Then these welcome figures loomed through the blizzard—the miracle had happened. The rescue party was on its way to the children in that marooned bus, but the thing that puzzled Chamberlin was who had raised the alarm?

The driver? But it couldn't have been Rossi, for he had gone by the other road, to the farm.

A strange story emerged a few days later, once he had recovered sufficiently from his ordeal, for it seemed that the inexplicable had taken place. Several of the villagers in Oscanoro swore on oath that the rescue party had been raised when the snow-covered figure of Rossi staggered into the local tavern to gasp out that the children on the bus were trapped down the mountainside. Chamberlin's brother Richard was also there, but he had not known Rossi. But even he wore later that somebody had arrived just as the others described, and he had joined the rescuers.

The newcomer had shrugged off all suggestions to remain in the village. He was most eager to lead them back down the mountainside, and he did, though he didn't even pause when John Chamberlin was found, but pressed on into the storm. Yet, was it really Pietro who had reached Oscanoro?

At least a dozen people are ready to swear so, but John Chamberlin claims that this was impossible, and a myriad of facts later appear to back his argument up.

The man who raised the alarm didn't return with the party from the bus and he was never seen in Oscanoro again. Somewhere between the bus and the village he vanished. John Chamberlin swears that Rossi headed towards the farm—and, had he changed his mind, then he would have seen the bus driver on the road to Oscanoro.

Weeks later, when the blizzard had exhausted itself and the roads were passable, a farm car trundled up the hillside from that farm into Oscanoro. There was an old woman at the reins—and Pietro Rossi's corpse was lying in the back.

She told the police that he had stumbled into her farm early on the evening of the "big blizzard." That he had been dying from exposure and that he had begged her to rescue his passengers. But she was unable to help, for she was too old to venture out into the storm, and she was alone there. So all she could do was sit beside the dying man until he breathed his last.

He had never left her cottage that night, she was certain of that. . . .

Yet, there are the villagers who swear that it was Pietro Rossi they saw—that it was Pietro Rossi who raised the alarm.

John Chamberlin agrees with the old farm woman and

the physicians who carried out a post-mortem on the bus driver's body—such a thing was impossible—for Rossi was dead by then.

THE SHADE THAT PROPHESED

Is there life after death? It's a question that has been posed and never answered, since man first began to think. The Christian belief, is of course, well known, but it goes on to say that a man's soul departs this earth—and can never return.

What then, do we make of the myriad cases of hauntings and other psychic phenomena? And what can be made of the case of Major Timothy Mallelieu of the 1st Battalion, the Suffolk Regiment, killed in 1917 and who, through a medium, revealed himself to be remarkably well informed on events of the 1960s and many centuries into the future? He is surely a spirit, bound so close to earth that he almost seems to read the daily papers—of the future.

No one can guess, who has not experienced it, what barriers of space and time can be broken by the disembodied spirit. Certainly the gallant major was ignorant of intimate facts of the time before his birth, as he was knowledgeable of those that occurred after his death. If the soul is free to roam forward in time, then why not backwards? One can puzzle, fruitlessly, about the anomalies outlined above for a lifetime—and wind up baffled in the end.

All the participants of this excursion into the occult can be vouched for, because I have known them intimately for many years. All of them are what testimonials love to refer to as, "honest, sober and upright citizens." Three are university graduates, while the fourth—the medium herself—has integrity enough to be the personal secretary of a prominent lawyer. Such people seldom lie, or concoct fanciful stories which would cast doubts on their level-headedness. As for the shade of the major, his story has been checked as far as has been possible.

As for his prophecies, many of these have occurred at the time of writing in the way predicted, and have been accurate enough in their main essentials. Finally, such facts as he

gave about his personal life, including places and events, were largely unknown to the four people mentioned above. It is due to the foresight of one of them in taking down and keeping notes for four years, that this truly remarkable story of the ghost who prophesied can now be evaluated.

The medium, whose name has been changed for obvious reasons, is constantly irritated by her growing reputation as a "psychic sensitive." Most likely her distaste for the occult is a direct result of that very human emotion—fear of the unknown. And the occult is the unknown—and dangerous.

The medium, whom we shall call Martha, can rarely be persuaded to preside over a seance, since what for others is merely a party trick can—and sometimes does—develop into a living nightmare for her. It is no pleasant thing to be aware, for weeks, of someone watching you, as she has been after a seance of a few hours, and to know that the watcher does not belong in this world.

One October night, Martha was persuaded by two friends to "have a go" and fish a soul out from the infinite for a few hours conversation. Martha, as ever, was unwilling, but finally agreed to try a Ouija board with her husband as partner, so the glass was upturned, lexicon cards were arranged around it and all was ready.

With many people it can take hours for the glass to make the most grudging movement, but with Martha, charged as she must be with some unknown power, the glass moved almost instantly with controlled, intelligent rapidity. For the skeptic it might be necessary to state that for most of the time, both Martha and her husband had their eyes closed and could therefore, never have been able to guide the glass to any one letter, let alone several sentences.

Questions were either spoken out loud or merely thought of, but in either case the answer was forthcoming the moment they had been formulated. However, before the questions could properly begin, the group was somewhat surprised to have the message, "good evening" spelled out before they could even start.

In this, as in most of the subsequent monologue, Major Mallelieu showed himself to be polite and correct in the best Victorian manner.

His memory of the events immediately leading up to his death had remained quite clear. He and his regiment had been holding the line at Ypres in July 1917, when his company (it was "A" company) was shelled in the prelude to

what he assumed was a big attack. His last conscious thoughts were certainly right in this, for the shelling was the overture to that mass carnage known to history as Paschendaele, or the third battle of Ypres.

Major Mallelieu and most of his men survived for a few brief minutes, for in his own words, "It was a choking, yellow fog." He did not actually say it was poison gas, for the good reason that he never had time to learn that the German Army had sophisticated its original gas delivery and invented *gas shells*. And Paschendaele, in fact, was the first occasion in which they were used.

He was reticent about his life before that final, ghastly attack, and confined himself to saying he had been married and had two children, who, like him had been born in Ipswich, Suffolk. He was equally non-committal about his present "existence," saying merely that he was present on "a plane of love" and, more immediately, was "standing" behind Martha. Personal particulars were concluded with the name of his school, an essential for an English officer of his era, and surprisingly, his dislike of the present British Premier—Harold Wilson!

It was this last statement, incredible in the circumstances, and astounding in its implications, that led to a series of "conversations" with the three present. He never addressed so much as a sentence to the medium, the being through whom he contacted the living.

His comments from here on are revealing in the accuracy of his knowledge of daily events, and on the immediate future of the participants. It also indicated that his spirit, or what claimed to be his spirit, was humanly ignorant of little things.

As an example, Martha's married friends were informed they would shortly buy a house, which was news to them, that it would be in an outer suburb of London called Alper-ton, and there would be some difficulty over roads. The chivalrous major then advised the husband to think carefully and investigate thoroughly before buying. The couple did, indeed, buy a house, two years later. It was in the area mentioned. They found, on inquiry, that a road widening scheme was being considered by the local authorities. The "difficulty" spoken of was that the proposed widening would have chopped off the front garden, bringing the pavement almost to the door. As the good soldier had also repeatedly mentioned the worth of the house as an investment

his acumen was certainly underlined. The road widening would automatically have lowered the value of the house.

As an example, too, of this remarkable ghost's human ignorance, it was unable to give the new house's exact location, because, as he said, "I regret I do not know that area well." His curious Victorian phrasing, peppered throughout every sentence, illustrated the fact that he was born in the year 1887, when everybody spoke in a fashion that can now only be found in the books of Rider Haggard, Conan Doyle and their contemporaries.

The wife was then singled out for the next series of messages, most of which concerned private details which meant nothing to the others, including her husband. The spirit rounded off his discourse by telling her that she would shortly change her job (*employment* was his word). A year after this she would be expecting a child. Once more the seemingly omniscient major was proved to be correct. The wife, who had been quite happy working where she was at the time, was forced to move after falling out with a departmental head. The child is now expected.

The monologue, for few questions were needed, was now switched to Martha's husband. This worthy, who worked in a publishing house, had no pretensions to being an author. He was amazed and delighted to be told that he would be asked to write a first book within 18 months. Though skeptical of the information gratuitously offered, he nevertheless duly noted it in his mind.

The major's time sense appeared to be at fault in this particular prediction for the opportunity did not offer itself for a full two years after this. The first book has not yet been completed at the time of writing, but Martha's husband has not forgotten another prediction. This also deals with another book, on a certain period of Roman history, a subject on which the potential author knows little, but on which he firmly believes he will be writing in the distant future; as foretold.

Thus far the well informed officer had confined himself to the personal affairs of himself and those present, but at this stage he appeared to remember his earthly profession. As a soldier he began an appraisal of the affairs of the world. While deploring the collapse of the British Empire, he appeared to "eye," if that's the word, the Americans' "sphere of influence," and their conduct in it, with soldierly approval. He passed judgment, however, on the inadvisability of com-

mitting themselves too heavily in Vietnam. At this point, Major Mallelieu seemed to the participants to leave the realm of possibility.

The gloom of war was hardly dispelled by the next pronouncement; that soon Russia would go to war with her ancient, implacable foe and erstwhile friend, China. The outcome, he assured the four, would be certain victory for the former, but one gained at enormous cost.

It was at this point, that Martha began complaining of exhaustion. The other woman, on being told that one of the two men present would be killed in the repercussions of this war, refused to go on with the session and to the men's chagrin it was broken up.

Since this little affair many of the less important prognostications have come about, in essence if not in detail. For the others time alone will tell. It is as well to remember that convincing though the major was, it is quite possible he could have been wrong.

THE MYSTERIOUS MADONNA OF BINSTED MANOR

There wasn't a sound to be heard anywhere in the woods about Binstead Manor, as Norman Shannon and I moved quietly about our preparations in the light of the two lamps. For the silence that lay heavily everywhere was more than uncanny—it was almost breathless.

Certainly, on an April evening in these ten square miles of what had formerly been one of the most sumptuous and well-cared parklands in Sussex there should have been some nocturnal activity. Perhaps a fox creeping stealthily through the tangled undergrowth, or a rat disturbing a nesting bird. Instead, there was only what I can describe as a brooding stillness, which was stressed even more by the throb of the distant traffic and distant hooting of an owl.

Norman and I heard these sounds almost unconsciously, as we finished our preparations to lay the ghost that nobody had ever seen—for it was almost as if we had stepped into another world. . . .

Indeed, that just about summed up my first impression of Binstead village, the manor and its immediate environment. For although the main coastal highway along the south of England, from Devon in the west to Dover in the east, swept noisily past almost within hailing distance, Binstead was a forgotten place—a village community that almost seemed to have lapsed into a forgotten pocket of time.

There isn't much of it anyway; just a handful of scattered houses along the lane, which leads from the minor road past the Black Horse Inn, to lose itself in the overgrown drive of the manorial lands . . . and a pair of rusted, open gates that mark the boundary into that other world.

Although both Norman and I lived a few miles further inland from Binstead; although we have always been enthusiastic psychical investigators, neither of us had ever heard about the Madonna of the Manor or the handful of other ghosts which infest the place, before last summer. And, even then, it was simply by accident.

Norman was researching for a book about Georgian architecture and during an afternoon in the British Museum reading room he saw an etching of an extremely beautiful manor house in Sussex. It was Binstead, less than 12 miles from his home near Goodwood racecourse.

The ghost rumors first manifested themselves when he asked locally about the manor, for after 12 years in that region of West Sussex, he was surprised that he had never once seen the place. Those from whom he elicited some facts were reluctant to discuss the place. Several admitted having heard about it and told him where the village was; others just shrugged the matter off and appeared surprised that somebody still thought the place existed.

Finally, he drove to Binstead and arrived at the gates to the manor. Although these were ajar, they were hanging so heavily towards each other that he had to proceed the rest of the way on foot. After pushing his way through a jungle of briar and every other conceivable weed, he finally reached the house.

But it was no longer the splendid architectural specimen he had seen in that old volume in the British Museum library. In less than fifty years, it had fallen into such a state of dilapidation that he was surprised it hadn't been demolished, for safety's sake if for nothing else.

His greatest surprise was still in store for him, because the first object he saw right in the center of the drive, half

hidden by weeds, was a perfect miniature statue of a Madonna. Everything around her might have fallen into decay, but the Madonna and the vivid color of the paint was as mint fresh as it must have been on the day the statuette had been purchased.

Further surprises followed, for once he stepped inside the house, past the gaping doorway, the debris that the previous owners had left still remained—almost as if they had dropped everything and fled from the house at a moment's notice.

On a hall table, thick with dust and mildew, Norman noticed a batch of what we discovered later to be unopened letters and bills that had been left here waiting attention, but they had never been opened. Several were proved much later to carry the date May, 1913.

The rest of the house was much the same. In the bed-chambers only the rats and other rodents had disturbed the linen. Although the wardrobe doors had dropped off, in most cases there remained remnants of moth-eaten, rotted clothing hanging there. Several decent portraits and pictures hung on the walls, carpets covered the floors and staircase, newspapers were lying about, yellowed and faded with the years, in the booklined library.

There was ample evidence everywhere that something strange—and quite terrible—had happened there a very long time ago, just as the signs proved that nobody had disturbed anything since.

It was shortly after this that he co-opted my help in tracking down the facts that led to a most curious occult situation, with ghosts and a sad legend that has probably never been equaled anywhere. And, of course, the enigmatic Madonna statuette in the driveway. . . .

That was a mystery all of its very own, a mystery that is unsolved even today. And even today it can still be seen by the curious-minded, in the very same spot in that Sussex estate.

The villagers in Binstead weren't very cooperative once we started questioning them about the enigma of the manorial residence, save that it was obvious they treated the place with such respect and fear that not one of them would trespass there. It was only after plundering the archives of a county newspaper (and then calling in the assistance of a professional archivist in London's British Museum) that we started to unravel the mystery.

By 1913, Binstead Manor was almost two centuries old and it had been in the possession of the Gates family since its conception. A wealthy family, they were well-respected throughout the county and Binstead Manor, with its well landscaped gardens and parklands which stretched for many miles more than they do today, was truly one of the nation's showpieces. And then, the manor was inherited by Nigel Begley, a nephew and the only surviving male heir in the family.

Begley, apparently, soon became one of the most popular hosts and most sought after guests among the eligible young men in the district. Not only was he gay and charming, handsome and wealthy, but one of the conditions of the inheritance was that he should marry within the year—and produce children to insure that the traditions of the Squires of Binstead were continued.

Much to everybody's satisfaction, he soon became engaged to Lady Sarah Flower, a young woman as beautiful as he was handsome, and in her own way even more eligible and wealthy. The product of a devout Victorian Roman Catholic background, it was expected by their friends that Lady Sarah would soon help Begley to settle down to the humdrum, if more responsible, life of a country squire.

Certainly, as the preparations for their impending wedding were underway, her fiance seemed to settle down more. He began devoting his time and attention to making the estate more productive, and introduced what were then advanced ideas to develop the farms he had also inherited.

And then he saw Harriet Doe, a gypsy girl, at Chichester market. Nobody ever knew how it started, but Begley became quite enchanted with her and became also her lover.

Within a matter of weeks, Harriet had moved into Binstead as a parlor maid, and as the months passed before Begley's wedding date with Lady Sarah, his illicit love affair with Harriet became common knowledge all over Sussex. Everybody knew about it—everybody, that is, except his fiancée.

The wedding was no more than a few weeks off, when Nigel Begley received a visitor one morning—it was his prospective father-in-law. Bluntly, Viscount Flower told Begley that unless Harriet was out of the house at once, he would tell Sarah everything that he had so far concealed

from her. Then, there was no doubt at all, Sarah would refuse to go through with the wedding.

This reaction from any young man's future father-in-law is today the last thing we would expect. But at that time, men of property and wealth were expected to "sow their wild oats" before settling down to married life. And in the eyes of both Nigel Begley and Viscount Flower, this was all that Begley had been doing, for he knew that Lady Sarah was a far more suitable choice of helpmate in his social circle, than the gypsy girl could ever have been.

So that very evening, he dismissed Harriet. Perhaps this story would never have been written if Begley had dealt with the situation in a different way; but instead of dismissing Harriet himself, he told his housekeeper to sack her instantly—as she would any other servant.

Later that night, as Begley and Viscount Flower were riding towards Binstead from some social function, the gypsy girl sprang out from the woods and tried to seize Begley's arm. The young squire spurred his horse, raised his riding crop and lashed out at the girl.

Then, as the two horsemen galloped off into the darkness, Harriet's screaming, angry voice rang out after them. She cursed Begley and all who would ever bear his name; she shouted that he would never spend as long with any other woman as he had done with her—and that within a year, Binstead Manor would be occupied only by the bats and rats, and by "a holy ghost. . . ."

This curse, with the enigmatic sounding last condition, was many years later written down by Viscount Flower, as some explanation of the strange sequence of tragedies that soon broke out at Binstead.

Immediately after the wedding, Begley and his wife went to the south of France for a long honeymoon. Harriet Doe was last seen riding along the road to London on a farm cart, with all her meager possessions beside her.

The honeymoon over, the newlyweds returned to the manor, and on their first night home a fierce storm tore across the coast lands from the Channel. Torrential rain swept down from a turbulent sky and a gale force wind made the trees sway, groan and drag their roots. Inside Binstead Manor, however, there was a housewarming party to welcome the happy young couple home. A lavish dinner had been prepared, servants scurried to and fro attending to the guests, and out in the driveway, just after midnight, the

first few coaches were waiting to take the early-departing guests home.

Suddenly, the wind dropped for a few moments, and a strange hush fell across the countryside. Then with a thunderous crash, the large heavy oaken front door of the house hurtled open. But there was nobody there.

Few people noticed anything unusual inside the house, but later this incident proved to have a significant and sinister meaning. For, it has been claimed, some manifestation of evil swept into the manor with an unearthly wind—a wind that simply did not exist.

Once the guests had gone, the servants started to tidy away the debris. Nigel Begley went into his study to smoke a last cigar and catch up on the affairs of his estate. Lady Sarah, on the other hand, retired to her rooms for the night. Then just before two o'clock in the morning, the few servants who were still up came rushing from their quarters into the hall after a terrified scream shattered the silence of the house.

Begley was standing at the foot of the stairs staring up at the first floor landing with an expression of sheer terror. His wife in her night robe was teetering at the top, waving and gesticulating as if she was struggling with someone. Yet, all that could be seen was a faint movement in the shadows—a movement which several servants swore later looked like a woman in a ragged dress with a shawl about her. A woman—or a manifestation—who looked like the gypsy girl, Harriet Doe. . . .

Before anybody could move, Lady Sarah toppled backwards down the stairs. Her last scream stopped abruptly—as her neck snapped when she hit the bottom stair. Then with a moan like a terrified animal, her husband backed slowly away from the stairs—staring wide-eyed at something that only he could see, coming down the stairs towards him.

A second later, he turned, wrenched the bolts from the door and fled out into the storm-filled night. And that was the last anybody ever saw of Nigel Begley. . . .

The tragedy—the twin tragedies, in fact—as well as the eerie implications behind it soon gained Binstead Manor the reputation of being possessed by malignant and evilly terrifying forces. Villagers described the ghostly lights they had seen about the place. Young men who ventured into the rapidly decaying grounds on poaching forays told of the sobbing sounds they heard emanating from the manor. But

the servants, who deserted the place a few days after Begley disappeared claimed that it was haunted by Harriet Doe's ghost. For, at the post mortem into Lady Sarah's uncanny death, the authorities found that the gypsy girl had died the night Sarah Begley died . . . that she had, in fact, been found drowned in a lake in Ireland.

But the most macabre discovery was the Madonna statuette that appeared from nowhere in the drive of Binstead Manor. Nobody knows where it came from, who placed it there, or what its significance is. Yet, many who examined it allege that the statue's features bore a striking resemblance to Harriet Doe. Over the years, too, it has gained a reputation all of its own, which may or may not be linked with the haunting . . . because although the elements have regularly faded the paintwork of the figurine, each year somebody repaints it! And each year, on the anniversary of the disaster at the manor, a garland of fresh flowers is found draped about the Madonna's shoulders. Again—a baffling action, for this has happened regularly each year for over half a century, without any investigators discovering by whom, when or why it is all accomplished.

This was the enigma that Norman Shannon and I set out to unravel recently. And using every modern device—tape-recorders and infra-red cameras, all with trip switches—as well as the more traditional tools of the psychical investigators, we wanted to prove once and for all whether this was a human—or a suprahuman—action.

Nobody but the two of us knew what we were doing. We trekked through the estate from the main highway, late at night, so that none of the locals would see. Then we set our trap.

In the morning, when we returned our cameras had been sprung, the tape recorders had run the full length, but the threads were intact and there was not one print on the fine powder we had scattered all around. It seemed certain that nobody had gone near the Madonna. It would have been an impossible achievement without leaving some trace, yet the statue had been painted anew and there was a garland of flowers about its neck. Wild flowers, which must have been gathered over a wide area of the country in a painstaking way.

Our film revealed nothing, except that in several of the exposures, the colors of the statue of the Madonna had been faded just as it was when we first saw it, and there were

no flowers present. In the last few, however, it had been transformed exactly as we describe it above.

Both Norman and I have played these tapes over time and time again, but we have discovered no sound that can explain it. Occasionally the tapes reveal soft scufflings as some small creature might have made, and always they let us hear the wind sighing through the trees. And it is in this last sound that we thought we heard something. . . .

It might have been a woman's voice, sobbing quietly to herself. Or, again, it might just be the wind—sighing softly in the trees.

I doubt now whether the mystery of that Madonna or of Lady Sarah's death will ever be resolved. For with Nigel Begley's fifty-year disappearance, he has been presumed dead for some years and, finally, I hear that a distant relative who inherits it all has been traced to Melbourne, Australia. However, this young man certainly fulfills the gypsy girl's curse, for he has no intention of residing in his estate.

Instead, it is now being developed for building land—and the mysterious Madonna statuette that came from nowhere is being donated to a museum.

THE HOUSE IN THE SQUARE

In the late summer of 1938, Peter Jameson arrived in Rouen with all his worldly possessions packed, as usual, in two battered carryalls. One contained his clothing, the other the tools of his trade. He was a painter—not a very successful one, but earning enough to enable him to lead the life he preferred, wandering from one city to another.

He knew Rouen slightly and had already decided more or less where he wanted to stay—somewhere in the old quarter near the cathedral. Finding a place was another matter, but he was an old hand at that. The thing to do was to get on friendly terms with some local character and lead the conversation casually around to the fact that he was looking for cheap, comfortable lodgings. Often he had found ideal lodgings where his hosts considered it an honor to lodge an artist at a purely nominal charge. Peter Jameson had no scruples about exerting his considerable charm when money was at stake.

Near the cathedral he found his first objective: a small shabby cafe that bore the faded legend "Henri's Bar" above its dusty window. Outside there was a single table and chair on the pavement. Gratefully, Jameson dumped his luggage, moved the chair into the shade and waited.

A man came out from the dark interior and approached the table. The owner of the cafe, Jameson guessed, for apart from the fact that such a tiny place was unlikely to boast paid staff, there was a certain air about the man which made it unlikely that he was a waiter. He was in his late forties—a short, stocky man with an air of immense, but quiet, confidence. He looked as though he might once have been a seaman.

Jameson ordered a drink and sat enjoying the cool and quiet day while it was brought to him. He finished it, ordered another and invited the man to join him. Companionably, they saluted each other and exchanged the casual gossip of strangers. Jameson learned that his companion's name was, indeed, Henri, that he had owned this little bar for three years and that trade was not particularly good. That much was obvious; over the next half-an-hour only two other customers appeared.

At last, Jameson broached his purpose. At the back of his mind lay the hope that there might, perhaps, be a room behind the shabby facade of the cafe. He liked this quiet man with the heavy, tolerant face and faintly sardonic method of speech. But Henri merely looked politely interested.

It seemed to Jameson that there was a deliberate hesitation about the man, as though he were trying to make up his mind. At last he shrugged, and then pointed to where the street ended in a square of sagging houses. "Try number 10," Henri smiled to himself. "You will find it cheap—and interesting, unless perhaps you are superstitious, non?"

Jameson's interest was aroused. He had slept in many curious places over the past few years, for a nomad like himself learned to be tolerant. But Henri's manner seemed to indicate that there was something unusual about the house, so Peter ordered yet another round of drinks and Henri unbent slightly.

There was an apartment to let in the house, he said. To be precise, there had been a flyblown notice in the window for nearly twenty years. Few people ever saw the owner of the house outside. Locally, he was known as "the Professor,"

and he lived alone in the house save for his invalid daughter. It was believed that he lived on a tiny annuity which his wife had left him, and presumably in order to augment his income he tried to let the apartment after his wife's death. But there had been few, very few, tenants during those twenty years. Some stayed only a matter of hours. . . .

Henri looked mockingly at Jameson. "I shall receive a percentage if you take it. I should tell you that I have never yet received a commission. But they are good rooms, with an excellent view of the cathedral."

That was all he would say. Intrigued and somewhat irritated by the mockery, Jameson immediately decided to leave his luggage at the cafe and investigate the place.

From an artist's point of view the square was ideal. The houses were immensely old, each propped up by its neighbors, and they seemed to huddle around the square like a group of gossiping old women.

Number 10 was even more forlorn than its neighbors. The windows on the bottom floor had long since been broken and were patched with old rags and papers, while those on the upper floor were whole, but so grimed that they cast no reflection and seemed as opaque as the brickwork.

One of the windows on the upper floor, however had a light behind it, a fact which struck Jameson as curious, because it was not yet four o'clock on a summer's afternoon.

His attention was distracted as the door opened and an immensely tall, thin old man peered down at him. He seemed to be in the last stages of some mortal disease for the eyes were deepsunk in the parchment-like skin, and seemed to be glaring with a light of their own. He was trembling, slightly but steadily.

Jameson gestured at the flyblown notice in the fanlight of the door. "Is the apartment still available?"

For answer, the old man opened the door slightly wider and stood aside as Jameson entered. The interior of the house was, if possible, even more decrepit than the outside and, as the doors closed, they were plunged into almost total darkness so that Jameson was forced to grope along the wall as they walked down the passage and ascended the stairs.

On the first floor the old man opened a door and stood aside. "The apartment," he said. Jameson entered—reluctantly.

As Henri had said, there was a magnificent view of the cathedral, but after a cursory glance Jameson forgot the window. The apartment was furnished in a style that had been outmoded even fifty years ago. There was not an undamaged piece of furniture in the whole place. Sofas sagged, their stuffing appearing like entrails; chairs were propped up against the wall or each other, the table creaked alarmingly as he put his hand upon it.

"The bedroom is through there," came the harsh voice behind him and, obediently, Jameson walked through the crumbling curtain drawn across an open door.

Jameson had indeed slept in many curious places, but the one thought in his mind as he entered the bedroom was to get out again—fast. The fact that it stank was almost irrelevant; the fact that the vast bed with its load of ancient coverings was an obvious breeding ground for vermin was, too, unimportant.

What did affect him immediately was an overpowering sense of hostility, a feeling that to enter any further into the room was to invite attack. From *what*—from *whom*? Outside was the sunlit afternoon, but here was a pool of stagnant, evil darkness.

It was very quiet. "The Professor" was presumably still at his post near the outer door, but gave no hint of his presence. From behind the crumbling panel near the door came a sudden scurry—a rat, thought Jameson with distaste. Reluctantly, he stepped further into the room.

It was as though he were pushing against a physical obstacle, so clear, so unequivocal was the hostility there. And making a sudden decision, he walked out. The old man looked at him fixedly as he made some muttered excuse, but said nothing. A few moments later, with a feeling of relief, Jameson was standing in the sunlight of the street.

Henri was sardonically amused when Jameson described his experience. But the more he smiled, the more Jameson insisted that his imagination had not been playing tricks on him, that there had been *something* in the room hostile to him, a stranger. By dint of ceaseless questioning he extracted another nugget of information from Henri. The bedroom had belonged to the Professor's wife—in a sense, the whole house still belonged to her, for she had so tied matters up in her will that he could not sell it.

"And she doesn't want strangers in it?" Jameson asked accusingly.

But Henri merely smiled and went on polishing glasses. Jameson looked curiously at him. Was he being mocked for his imagination—or because Henri knew something that he did not?

He found alternative lodgings and throughout that summer worked hard. A curious relationship sprang up between him and the owner of the little bar near the cathedral. He never learned Henri's full name nor indeed anything about him, save that he had never married and seemed perfectly content to be the owner of a not-too-prosperous cafe in an unfashionable part of town.

Once or twice Jameson referred to the house in the square and received the expected answer—the apartment was still empty. Occasionally he would pass it and glance up at the window in the room he had been in, but only once did he see the light and he could not swear that it was not a faint reflection from the sunset sky.

Henri was as reticent about the Professor as he was about everything else and Jameson had almost forgotten the whole curious incident when, on one of his visits to the bar, Henri told him casually that the Professor and his daughter were dead. They had died within days of each other, a week earlier. . . .

He seemed uneasy and Jameson waited for what was to come next. Then, in an almost talkative manner, Henri explained that the agents for the house had asked him to make an inventory of its contents. He was on his way there now, and would Jameson accompany him?

Jameson agreed without much enthusiasm. It was a dismal autumn evening with sudden squalls of rain from a lowered sky—not the kind of evening to enter that particular house. But he had given his word and, after Henri had locked up, the two walked rapidly down the street and into the square.

To his surprise, Jameson noticed that the light was burning—far brighter than he had noticed it on the previous two occasions. Puzzled, he drew Henri's attention to it, but Henri said that it must be the reflection from the street lamps.

Jameson was not satisfied; the lamp was at the wrong angle and there had been a distinct note of unease in Henri's voice, but before he could reply Henri had produced a massive iron key and opened the door.

The house breathed out an atmosphere of deathly chill.

If the Professor had been dead for only a week, it could only recently have been empty. But it felt as though no human foot had crossed the crumbling threshold for a decade. The heavy, musty smell that Jameson had remembered was intensified. Somewhere, a loose shutter banged as gusts of air caught it and, again, Jameson heard the scurrying of some small animal. When did rats abandon an empty house, he found himself wondering.

They made their way up the creaking stairs. At the top Henri activated the ancient gas jet which illuminated the landing and passed through into the first room. Carefully, he noted the contents in a thick notebook then passed on to the next room. After some minutes all the rooms in the house had been examined, with the exception of the two rooms that had comprised the apartment which had been for long "to let."

Henri stood for a long moment on the landing outside the door. His face was as impassive as ever, but Jameson knew beyond a shadow of doubt that if he had not been there, Henri would have left the house without entering them. At last he put his hand upon the heavy handle and pushed the door open.

As it swung open they became aware of a dim light coming from beyond the heavy curtains that masked the inner door.

"There is a light in that bedroom," Jameson said and found that he was whispering.

"It is the street lamp, the street lamp," Henri replied angrily. He gathered himself together and then strode forward, tearing the curtains aside and throwing open the door to the bedroom in one movement.

The room was flooded with a cold, blue light that seemed to focus all about the ancient bed. It was a light which threw no shadows whatsoever. Beneath the grimy washstand, behind a bulky commode, beneath the bed itself, the light fell as though it were capable of passing through solid objects as though they were so much glass.

And, overwhelmingly now, Jameson felt that hostile presence which seemed to strike as with a physical impact.

How long they stood there, mesmerized by that infinitely evil light, he could not afterwards say. His next clear memory was of hastening down the stairs in pursuit of Henri who had turned and fled from the room. By the time that Jameson reached the street door, Henri had disappeared.

He never saw Henri again. Somehow, he could not bring himself to return to the bar, for *that* relationship had been shattered by the stark fear and guilt that he had seen on his companion's face in the split second when he turned and ran.

Shortly afterwards, Europe erupted in the chaos of the second world war and Jameson left Rouen at a moment's notice. But he returned to it again five years later, in the late autumn of 1944, part of the victorious army of liberation. The house in the square had gone, along with all its decrepit neighbors, pounded into rubble.

Part of the street that led to it was still intact, but where Henri's bar had been was an emergency water tank. Further down the road was a makeshift office—one of the many established to guide and advise the thousands of refugees who were slowly finding their way back to normal life. On impulse, Jameson entered.

On the face of it, it seemed unlikely that anyone would know what had happened to one particular person out of the thousands who had been uprooted by war. But Jameson was fortunate. The official he spoke to was glad of a break from endless form filling and willingly answered Jameson's questions. Yes, he remembered Henri's Bar—but Henri himself had disappeared. The last heard of him was that he had been taken off to Germany and had never returned.

The official shook his head. "An unhappy family," he said, and with a sudden excitement Jameson realized that this chance-met man might hold the key to the mystery that had haunted him for seven years.

Yes, said the official. He knew the family. They used to live in a gloomy house in the bombed square—No. 10. Henri abruptly left home when the mother died, for he did not get along with his father, "the Professor."

"There was a scandal about his mother's death, I seem to remember," said the man, "but that was a long time ago and nobody ever knew the truth. Did you know him?"

Jameson nodded slowly: "I suppose so—as well as anyone could have." And in that moment he saw Henri's face again, as it had been on that last night—before he had fled from the ghostly terror which he had recognized hovering in the blue light in his dead mother's bedroom.

AN AGE-OLD POWER BEYOND ALL REASON

At most spiritualist seances there's a very good chance that sooner or later the deep, sonorous voiced spirit of a North American Indian will manifest itself to become the contact with that other world. It's a technique that is as old as the religion—and has origins which are shrouded in more mystery than any other branch of the occult.

For the introduction of the North American Indian "guide" into spiritualism has its foundations in a centuries old enigma which has been witnessed a great many times by the learned, the profound and highly critical observers; all of whom have been completely baffled by the riddle of the shaking tent of the medicine man."

Although it's over three and a half centuries since the French explorer Samuel de Champlain first witnessed this, during his travels in Canada, none of the hundreds of other Europeans who later shared this uncanny experience have been able to explain it as anything other than supernatural—as a power beyond all human comprehension.

Basically, it seems a simple enough process. For the medicine man just builds a wigwam or tepee of ordinary wooden stakes, which is then covered with animal skins or, in latter days, even with canvas. That was all the material preparation required, yet such was the Indians' faith in the powers of these "shaking tents" that they depended on them solely to protect them against their enemies during the night. But its most important function was to foretell the future . . . with incredible accuracy!

All the eyewitness accounts of this phenomenon, which has mainly been seen in the Canadian tribes of the Huron, Algonquin or Montagnais, are remarkably identical. For after constructing the tepee, which was sometimes done by the warriors, the medicine man stripped himself of all clothing and ornaments, and lay down inside the tent to invoke the devils.

Often the medicine man—or *pilotois*—was in full view of the onlookers, yet the tent began to vibrate in a curious way, which it was claimed was caused by the spirits invoked. And as the *pilotois's* incantations worked him into a frenzy he writhed terribly and screamed in many dif-

ferent voices. Often, too, smoke could be seen issuing through the open tepee top, yet there was never any fire inside—and never were any traces found afterwards.

And it was at the climax of his trance, when the violent shaking of the tepee threatened to rip it from the ground and the uncanny echoing voices rang out through the night, that the prophecies were made.

Yet the baffled investigators found the entire performance even more remarkable in the years after de Champlain's report. The Canadian Indians were actually proud to exhibit their miracle to all and sundry; they had nothing to conceal.

One of the most painstaking investigations into this was carried out just over 200 years ago, by a Jesuit priest named Paul LeJeune, who arrived from France with this one aim in mind—to unravel the secret of the "Shaking Tent."

He spent his second winter among the Montagnais Indians. From October 1634 to April 1635 he tramped the woods with them on snowshoes in search of game, crouching at night in their smoky, overcrowded wigwams and always having to put up with noise, bad food, danger of disease, and constant bickering and rudeness. All this time he lost no opportunity to convert his companions. But he found that the chief obstacle to his efforts was the sorcerer or medicine man who manipulated the occult forces that the Indians so much feared.

The Jesuits were well educated, trained in accurate observation and logical thinking. They did not study the phenomena merely as outsiders; they lived with the practitioners of magic, gained their confidence and became familiar with their background. This made them very acute critics. In principle, they believed in the supernatural—in miracles and visions—but not in the validity of anything manifested outside the Catholic Church. Since they wanted to destroy the sorcerers' influence, they were, to the limits of common sense, skeptical about the sorcerers' claims. Like modern scientific investigators, they explained away all that they possibly could as the product of fraud, jugglery and coincidence. But a small residue of phenomena remained that they could not explain away. This the Jesuits attributed to the agency of the Devil. The modern scientist cannot use this explanation but has not yet found a better.

Father LeJeune presented his first eye-witness account of an Indian sorcerer's seance. One of his converts, a young man named Manitou-Chat-Che, had disappointed the Fa-

ther by giving up his new-found faith after only a few months, and relapsing into devil worship. Far from being ashamed of this, the convert tried to justify his action by offering to get LeJeune a chance to witness at close quarters some of the feats of his medicine man.

A few days later the Indian put his boast into effect. "Towards nightfall, when I was resting," wrote LeJeune in his *Relations*, "two or three young men erected a tent in the middle of our cabin. They stuck six poles deep in the ground in the form of a circle. To hold them in place they fastened to the top of these poles a large ring, which completely encircled them. This done, they enclosed the edifice with blankets, leaving the top of the tent open. It is all that a tall man can do to reach to the top of this round tower, capable of holding five or six men standing upright.

"When the tent had been erected," continued LeJeune, "the fires of the cabin were entirely extinguished, and the brands thrown outside lest the flames frighten away the 'spirits' or *khichi-gouai* who are to enter this tent. A young juggler slipped in from below, turning back for this purpose the covering which enveloped it; then replaced it when he had entered—for they must be very careful that there be no opening in this fine palace except from above. The juggler, having entered, began to moan softly, as if complaining. He shook the tent first without violence. Then, becoming animated little by little, he commenced to whistle in a hollow tone, as if it came from afar; then to talk as if in a bottle; to cry like the owls of these countries; then to howl and sing, constantly varying the tones; ending by these syllables—*ho ho, hi, hi, gui gui, nioue* and other similar sounds, disguising his voice so that it seemed to me I heard those puppets which showmen exhibit in France. At first he shook this edifice gently; but as he continued to become more animated, he fell into so violent an ecstasy that I thought he would break everything to pieces. I was astonished at a man having so much strength; for after he had once begun to shake it, he did not stop it until the consultation was over, which lasted about three hours."

Whenever the medicine man changed his voice, his audience responded by cries intended to encourage the spirits to enter the tent.

The voice of the medicine man grew stronger and his incantation louder. *Aiase Manitou, aiase Manitou, aiase*

Manitou! Ahiham, hehinham, hanhan, heninakhe, hose heninakhe. . . .

Suddenly the Indians pointed to the top of the tent. LeJeune looked up, and saw fiery sparks issuing from the vent hole. The medicine man responded in a hoarse strident voice quite different from his earlier tone. One of his assistants outside began to beat a drum. Several of the younger Indians stood up and danced excitedly around the tent.

The fiery sparks was a signal that the spirits were arriving and the medicine man could consult them. His first query was about his own health. He was told that he himself would survive the winter, but that his squaw would die.

The oracle was next asked about the weather—would there be much or little snow during the next few months? Would the elk and moose be plentiful or scarce this season? The spirits replied that they could see little snow and some moose.

LeJeune wanted to catch the medicine man before he left the tent; but in the darkness the conjuror somehow slipped out before the priest was aware of it. The Jesuit was impressed by what he had seen for when the Indians challenged him to enter the tent LeJeune refused, on the grounds that the Indians might do him some harm, and in any case would claim his curiosity as a proof that he had recognized the truth of their mysteries. Instead, he repeated his demand for a face-to-face meeting with the medicine man.

Some weeks later, LeJeune caught the medicine man off-guard and "sprung the subject on him." The Indian's natural reticence was overcome partly by a little skillful flattery, and partly by a reminder that he (LeJeune) never refused to answer any questions put to him about *his* faith. At last the medicine man agreed to talk, but only in parables.

"When you were inside the wigwam," asked the Jesuit, "and the spirits visited you, as you say, what did they look like?"

"I will tell you a story, Black Robe: Once two Indians built two wigwams side by side to call the spirits to them. One of these Indians had treacherously killed three men with an axe, and the *khichi-gouai*—the spirits—were very angry with him. So they entered the wigwam, and put him to death. Afterwards, they crossed into the wigwam of the other man and, thinking that he must be a friend of the first man, set about putting him to death too. But this man had an axe with him and defended himself so well that he killed

one of the *khichi-gouai*, and in this way it was found out how he was made."

"And how was he shaped?"

"He was as large as my fist, Black Robe, and his body was of stone and long at one end."

"In other words," corrected LeJeune, "he was just a cone-shaped piece of ordinary stone?"

The medicine man reacted. "No, he was of flesh and blood like us. For beside him lay the axe that had killed him, covered with blood."

"I see. And had he either feet or wings?"

"No."

"Then," argued LeJeune, "how could he enter or fly into the wigwam?"

The medicine man gave a sarcastic laugh. The priest persisted. "But I know trickery when I see it. Take those fiery sparks that I saw above the top of your wigwam. They must have come from a pipe of tobacco."

"I took no fire into the wigwam, Black Robe."

LeJeune reminded the medicine man that he had seen him, shortly before the seance began, lighting his pipe with a hot coal outside the tent.

"But I was named when I entered the wigwam," came the quick reply.

"Anyway, it was you, and no one else, who shook the wigwam from inside?"

"How could one man do that unaided, Black Robe? Did you not put your hand on the poles and try to do it for yourself?"

LeJeune argued that his own strength was much lesser than an Indian's.

"That may be. Yet you were present and tested the pole for yourself, and found it as solid as a rock. Later you saw it sway to and fro, and even bend down its top, though it was taller than a man. It shook so long and so violently that you must admit no human strength could cause this movement."

"I do admit that it would have exhausted any ordinary man."

Manitou-Chat-Che joined in the argument. "Next time, Father Black Robe, you must crouch down on the ground outside the wigwam and look under the beaverskin robes. Then you will see the arms and legs of our medicine man

sticking out under the bottom of the tent, at the very moment when the top is being violently shaken."

"What does shake it, then?" The question was directed to the medicine man.

"A strong and violent wind. The breath of the approaching spirits." At this point the argument reached deadlock. But LeJeune continued to make observations, and everything he saw astonished him more.

"While passing the winter with these savages," he recorded, "I often saw them perform this deviltry. I saw strong young men sweat to erect the tent. I saw it shake, not indeed with the violence that they say it does, but forcibly enough, and for so long a time that I was surprised any man had strength enough to endure such exertion. Still, as I did not try to test the round tower again, I fancied it must be the juggler that moved it."

The Indians alleged that the wind entered the tent with such force as to make the sorcerer feel he was being sucked down into an abyss; consequently, he slipped out of the tent, which went on shaking after he had quitted it.

One of the medicine men was so confident of this that he offered to bet LeJeune a substantial wager that he could make his tent move without anyone touching it. LeJeune accepted the wager, but at the same time warned the Indian that if the tent did move, the priest would accost the devil who caused it. Probably the devil would then fly into a rage, turn on the sorcerer, and kill him. At this suggestion the medicine man lost heart, and backed out of his wager.

Sometimes, so the Indians told LeJeune, the sorcerer in the tent would be bodily levitated far above the tent-top. In one such case, they said, the sorcerer's body-cloth was first thrown over the top of the tent. Then he himself was carried up in the air, leaving the tent empty. And later, he was heard to fall back inside the tent, giving a groan as he hit the ground. When this sorcerer came out of his trance, he could remember nothing of what had taken place, or where he had been.

A young Indian convert confirmed these feats of levitation by describing an occasion when he and a friend saw a sorcerer enter a trance and disappear, leaving only his robe on the ground. A few days later he returned to camp, utterly worn out.

In February 1635, the Jesuit Father was permitted to

take part in a ceremony of "operative witchcraft." The local sorcerer had heard that he was being threatened with death within two days by a rival practitioner, who lived in the Gaspé, more than a hundred leagues away. Not unnaturally, he determined to act first, and put his rival out of the way, by "absent treatment."

All the women and children were sent away except one woman, who was kept to serve as a kind of medium. A charm was prepared, compounded of pieces of wood forked like a snake's tongue, iron arrow tips, fragments of broken knives, iron bent into rough hooks, etc.—all wrapped in a piece of leather. Then the sorcerer beat his drum, which, says LeJeune, was "the size of a tambourine, and composed of a circle three or four fingers' length in diameter, and of two skins stretched tightly over it on both sides; they put inside some little pebbles or stones, in order to make more noise."

Shouting and screaming, the sorcerer raised a suitable uproar. Then, pointing to a place on the ground, and crying out, "Here is his head!" with all his might he drove into the earth two pointed sticks, at an angle pointing towards the place where his rival was supposed to be.

Next a deep ditch was dug alongside the sticks, and the sorcerer descended into it armed with a sword, and began a fierce fight with an invisible enemy. After this, he took the charm, buried it in the ditch, renewed his fight, and finally emerged triumphant, with his sword covered with blood. The ditch was then hurriedly filled up.

Then the sorcerer asked his audience whether they had heard the cries of his victim. "No, no," they all replied—all except two, who were distant relatives of the rival sorcerer. These alleged that they had heard in the dark woods crying and groaning sounds.

LeJeune was more affected by this mummary than he cared to admit. It reminded him of something with which every seventeenth-century European was painfully familiar—Satanism. These Indians were devil-worshippers, only without having entered into a formal pact with the Devil. "Not that the Devil communicates with them (the sorcerers), wrote LeJeune, "as obviously as he does with the sorcerers and magicians of Europe; but we have no other name to give them since they even do some of the acts of the genuine sorcerers—as, to kill one another by charms or wishes or imprecations, or by poisons which they concoct."

The priest could not help inquiring whether the Indians used these deviltries against the white man. He was told that they had done so, but could not make them sick.

LeJeune paid considerable attention to the Indians' methods of healing the sick, which in some cases bore a distinct resemblance to modern psychoanalysis. Nearly twenty years before LeJeune's arrival in Quebec, the Jesuits in Acadia had learned that the Indians believe one of the main sources of disease "is the mind of the patient himself, which desires something, and will vex the body of the sick man until it possesses the thing required. For they think that there are in every man certain inborn desires, often unknown to themselves, upon which the happiness of individuals depends. For the purpose of ascertaining the desires and innate appetites of this character they summon soothsayers, who, as they think, have a divinely imparted power to look into the inmost recesses of the mind."

The Montagnais practiced divination both by water and by fire. In May 1637 Father LeJeune witnessed a healing ceremony in which pyromancy was employed for a kind of ordeal.

"A number of stones were brought," he tells us, "and to make them red hot, a fire was prepared, hot enough to burn down the cabin. Twenty-four persons were chosen to sing and to perform all the ceremonies. I was waiting all the time to see what they would do with these stones that they were heating, making red hot with so much care. You may believe me, since I speak of a thing that I saw with my own eyes—they separated the brands, drew them (the stones) from the midst of the fire, and holding their hands behind their backs, took them between their teeth, carried them to the patient, and remained some time without loosening their hold, blowing upon them and growling in their ears. I am keeping one of the stones expressly to show you.

"The stone is about the size of a goose egg. Yet I saw a savage put it in his mouth, so that there was more of it inside than out. He carried it some distance, and after that it was still so hot that when he threw it on the ground sparks of fire issued from it. One of our Frenchmen had the curiosity to see if, in reality, all this was done without anyone being burned. He spoke to this Indian who had filled his mouth with live coals. He had him open his mouth and found it unhurt and whole, without any appearance of having been burned. And not only these persons, but even the

sick people were not burned. They let their bodies be rubbed with glowing cinders without showing any evidence of pain, and without their skin appearing in the least affected."

Some of the missionaries to other tribes had similar experiences of the Indian sorcerers' capacity to handle fire unscathed. Father Pijart sent LeJeune a specimen stone that had been carried red hot in his mouth by one of the medicine men. This stone had been softened by the fire and had an impression of the sorcerer's teeth; a cast was later taken by LeJeune of this *pilotois's* teeth and gave a perfect match.

Another Jesuit wrote about a Huron woman who cured herself of attacks of vertigo and nervous spasm by voluntarily undergoing a fire-walking ordeal. She had the public crier of her native village proclaim a feast, and directed that fires should be lighted in several wigwams. Then the woman, supported by two men "passed through the middle of all the fires, her feet and legs naked, without receiving any harm, while her two supporters, although they did their utmost to keep clear of being scorched, suffered greatly, as they were obliged to conduct her in this manner across upwards of 300 fires. As for her part, her constant complaint was of the cold; at the end of this course she declared she felt herself better."

The considered opinion of the Jesuit Father on the validity of the sorcerers' claims is worth quoting. Father LeJeune, in his *Relation of 1637*, concludes that "in all probability the Devil communicates visibly with these poor savages, who need help badly, both temporal and spiritual, to bring them up out of the slavery which oppresses them." However, two years later, he qualifies this conclusion somewhat. "I am persuaded that in fact there are a few among them who have communication with demons; but the majority are only impostors, exercising their tricks to extract presents from the sick poor, to make themselves popular, or to make themselves feared."

Father Brebeuf, in 1636, was rather more positive in crediting the sorcerers with real powers to command the elements, foretell the future, recover lost property, and heal the sick. "That they have these gifts of God, no one in my opinion will venture to assert. But that all they do is the product of deception or imagination hardly accords either with the reputation they have acquired, or with the length of time they have practiced their profession. How come that their tricks have never been exposed through all these years,

and that their trade has been so well rewarded—if they have never succeeded except through sheer imagination? There is, therefore, some ground for thinking that the Devil does sometimes lend them a helping hand, revealing himself to them for some temporal profit, as well as for their eternal damnation."

One other Jesuit opinion may be quoted, that of Paul Ragueneau, who succeeded LeJeune as Superior of the Huron Mission. Ragueneau (like Champlain) was definitely skeptical. He was familiar with a variety of forms of Indian clairvoyance. Sometimes the sorcerer would gaze on the surface of a basin of water, or on the glaze of a piece of porcelain; at other times a dark object, such as a robe of black squirrel skins, or the skin of a wild ass, would serve the seer's purpose.

"I have seen some of them," he wrote in 1647-48, "who claimed to have worked miracles, change a rod into a snake, and restore to life an animal that was dead. By dint of repeated assertions, some people came to believe them, and even declared that they had witnessed the phenomena. They have boasted in our presence of having performed these feats; but we have challenged these gentry and, in order to goad them on to greater activity and so to bring public confusion on themselves (for we were quite sure they would not live up to their claims), we have promised them great rewards, if they would perform their miracles before us. They have tried to evade the challenge without showing confusion; but their shameful retreat amounts to a serious admission that their game was really all trickery, and that they only appear convincing to those who accepted their false claims without examining them."

The next description of the "Tent" is given by Alexander Henry, in his *Travels and Adventures in the Years 1760-1776*. The French had recently lost Canada to the British; but the Indians, under their great leader, Pontiac, had broken out in rebellion. Henry found himself isolated at Sault-Ste.-Marie, and virtually a prisoner of the Ojibway. In 1764, a chance to escape opened up. One day a canoe arrived with messengers from Sir William Johnson, the Chief Indian agent of the British in North America, inviting the Ojibways to send a deputation to feast with him at Fort Niagara on Lake Ontario, and conclude a treaty of peace with the English. Henry naturally urged the Indians to accept this offer, so that he could go along with the deputa-

tion, as one step towards reaching Montreal. But the Ojibways could not make up their minds.

"Brother," said the chief, "we do not know whether this invitation is a trap or not. We shall let Mikinak, the Great Turtle, decide for us."

"The Great Turtle?"

"Yes, our master-spirit. We shall build him a house, and our medicine man will invite him to come into it and tell us the truth about the British."

Henry asked to be present at the ceremony.

Next day, the braves built an extra large wigwam, and inside it a smaller tent made of moose-skins hung over a framework of wood. The frame consisted of five poles, of five different kinds of lumber. Each pole was about ten feet long and eight inches in diameter. The diameter of the tent was four feet, and the poles were set two feet deep in the earth. They were tied together at the top with a hoop or girder. The moose-skin covering was fastened tightly to the poles with thongs of hide, but a loose flap was left on one side, to admit the medicine man.

After nightfall, the medicine man appeared nearly naked, and crept under the skins into the tent. "His head was scarcely inside when the edifice, messy as it has been described, began to shake; and the skins were no sooner let fall than the sounds of numerous voices were heard, and beneath them, some yelling, some barking like dogs, some howling like wolves; and in this horrible concert were mingled screams and sobs, as of despair, anguish and the sharpest pain. Articulate speech was also uttered, as if from human lips, but in a tongue unknown to any of the audience."

These noises were followed by dead silence, which was broken by what Henry calls "a low and feeble voice, resembling the cry of a young puppy." At this the Indians clapped their hands for joy, declaring that it was the voice of Mikinak, the Great Turtle. The previously heard sounds were the voices of evil spirits.

Next came a series of weird chants, after which the medicine man's voice said:

"The Great Turtle is present. He is willing to answer all questions."

The chief came forward and made an offering of tobacco to Mikinak, asking him to act as mediator with the good spirits, on behalf of all the Indians present. Then the chief

addressed the medicine man. "Will the Great Turtle tell us—are the English preparing to make war on the Ojibways? Are there many English redcoats at Fort Niagara?"

At this question, "the Tent instantly shook, and for some seconds after, it continued to rock so violently that I expected to see it leveled with the ground." Then followed a piercing cry, and silence for a quarter of an hour, during which time Mikinak was supposed to have crossed Lake Huron and visited first Fort Niagara, then the city of Montreal. At last the medicine man was ready to give his report.

"At Fort Niagara the Great Turtle has seen no great number of redcoats. But on going down the St. Lawrence to Montreal, he has found the river there covered with boats, and the boats filled with redcoats with guns, in number like the leaves of the trees. He has seen them on their way upstream, coming to make war upon the Indians."

The audience received this unwelcome news with uneasiness which, however, changed to relief when the next question was answered.

"If the Ojibways go to visit Sir William Johnson, will he receive us as friends?"

"Yes," replied the medicine man, "Mikinak says that Johnson will fill your canoes with presents and quantities of rum. Every man will return home safely to his family."

Henry's own curiosity aroused, he asked: "O Great Turtle, shall I soon revisit my own country?"

The wigwam vibrated strongly, and then came the answer. "Take courage, white man, no harm will come to you. In the end you will reach your friends and return in safety to your own country."

The ceremony went on until nearly midnight. "I was on the watch through the scene I have described," concludes Henry, "to detect the particular contrivances by which the fraud was carried on. But such was the skill displayed in the performance, or such my deficiency of penetration, that I made no discoveries, but came away as I went, with no more than those general surmises which will naturally be entertained by every reader."

Three years later, another English trader had the opportunity to see the Shaking Tent in a rather different kind of performance. Jonathan Carver tells of meeting a large party of Cree and Assiniboiné Indians on the shore of Lake Superior. They had come with their stock of furs to meet and do business with some European traders, with whom

Carver proposed to travel back east. But these traders were late in arriving, and the Indians began to run short of food. So a Cree medicine man announced that he would hold a conference with the "Great Spirit" and find out exactly when they would come. The Cree chief asked Carver to go along with him to see this ceremony. "No," replied the trader, "there will be nothing to see, but some trickery which may deceive you and your people, but not me."

"White man," came the answer, "our medicine man is no trickster. He is doing this business partly for your sake, to lessen your anxiety about your friends. Also, he will show you the power that he possesses, to talk with our Great Manitou."

Carver thought it wise to make no further criticism, but to go along with the Indians.

Next day the chief took him to a large tent whose covering of skins was partly drawn back to show what went on inside. The tent was surrounded with Indians, but Carver easily gained admission, and sat down on a skin on the ground to watch.

"In the center I observed that there was a place of an oblong shape, which was composed of stakes stuck in the ground, with intervals between, so as to form a kind of chest or coffin, large enough to contain the body of a man. These were of a middle size, and planted at such a distance from each other that whatever lay within them was readily to be discerned. The tent was perfectly illuminated by a great number of splinters cut from the pine or birch trees, which the Indians held in their hands."

The priest (or medicine man) now came in stark naked but for a loin-cloth, and laid himself down on a large elk-skin in front of Carver. He rolled himself up in the skin until he was completely enfolded in it, except for his head. Next, two young men took about forty yards of strong, elk-hide cord, and bound the medicine man up tightly in the skin, until he looked like "an Egyptian mummy." Then "one took him by the heels and the other by the head, and lifted him over the poles into the enclosure. I could also now discern him as plain as I had hitherto done, and I took care not to turn my eyes a moment from the object before me, that I might the more readily detect the artifice."

After a few seconds the priest began to mutter, softly, then to raise his voice. He spoke a mixed jargon of Ojibway, Ottawa and Cree, which Carver could not understand. Af-

ter a while the noise increased. The priest worked himself up into a frenzy, and foamed at the mouth. This lasted for three-quarters of an hour. At the end of this time he relapsed briefly into silence, as if exhausted—then suddenly sprang to his feet, shook off his coverings "as quick as if the bands with which it had been bound were burned asunder," and resumed speaking in a firm and audible voice.

"My brothers, the Great Spirit has deigned to hold a talk with his servant at my earnest request. He has not indeed told me when the persons we expect will be here; but tomorrow, soon after the sun has reached his highest point in the heavens, a canoe will arrive, and the people in that will inform us when the traders will come."

After this the priest stepped out of the enclosure, put on his robes and dismissed the assembly. Carver was surprised at what he had seen, but concealed his feelings and waited for the sequel.

Next morning all the Indians gathered together on the height overlooking the lake. Out of curiosity Carver went too, with the chief. "Every eye was fixed by turns on me and on the lake," he says, "when, just as the sun had reached its zenith—agreeable to what the priest had foretold—a canoe came around a point of land about a league distant. The Indians no sooner beheld it than they sent up a universal shout, and by their looks seemed to triumph in the interest their priest thus evidently had with the Great Spirit."

An hour later, the canoe touched land, and the crew were taken to the chief's tent where they were asked: "Now tell us, brothers, have you seen anything of the white traders?"

"We parted from them two days ago," came the reply. "They are on their way here. They will arrive the day after tomorrow." And according to Carver, the traders did arrive on the day and at the time prophesied.

Carver's veracity in some parts of his *Travels* has been questioned. But of this experience he writes with such modesty as to disarm skepticism. "The circumstances of it, I own," he says, "are of a very extraordinary nature. However, as I can vouch for their being free from either exaggeration or misrepresentation, being myself a cool and dispassionate observer of them all, I thought it necessary to give them to the public . . . leaving them to draw from it what conclusions they please." Those are hardly the words of a delirious romancer.

By the beginning of the last century the spread of Christianity had caused the virtual disappearance of Indian occult practices from Canada. The Shaking Tent was now only to be found in the territories of the Hudson's Bay Company; and those who were curious to see it had to journey out West.

One who was curious was an artist, Paul Kane, who in 1846 obtained permission from Sir George Simpson, the governor of the Hudson's Bay Company, to accompany the Spring Fur Brigade and travel through western Canada, making a pictorial record of the Indians and their ways. Naturally, Kane tried to see something of Indian sorcery.

On his way home in 1848 accompanied by Major MacKenzie, an official of the Hudson's Bay Company, he had the good luck to witness the Tent in full operation. The travelers had stopped for the night at Dog's Head, Behring River, near Lake Winnipeg. After dark their Indian guides and paddlemen constructed a medicine lodge, to procure a fair wind for the next day's journey. As usual, the Tent was made of ten or twelve stout poles driven into the ground and enclosing a circular area of about three feet in diameter. These poles were encased in a large boat sail, with an opening at the top. The medicine man then entered, caused the tent to shake violently, agitated his rattle, and sang his incantations in a hoarse voice.

"Meanwhile," reported Kane, "being unable to sleep on account of the discordant noises, I wrapped a blanket around me and went out into the woods, where they were holding their midnight orgies, and lay down among those on the outside of the medicine lodge, to witness the proceedings. I had no sooner done so than the incantations at once ceased, and the performer exclaimed that a white man was present. How he ascertained this fact I am at a loss to surmise, as it was pitch dark at the time, and he was enclosed in a narrow tent, without any apparent opening through which he could espy me, even had it been light enough to distinguish one person from another.

"After about two hours' shaking and singing, the medicine man cried out that he saw five boats with the sails set running before the wind; which communication was greeted by the whole party with their usual grunt of satisfaction and assent. After this, many questions were asked him by the Indians, some inquiring after the health of their families at home, whom they had not seen for many months. Upon

putting the question, the inquirer threw a small piece of tobacco over the covering of the tent, upon which the medicine man agitated the tent, and shook his rattle violently, and then replied that he saw one family enjoying themselves over a fat sturgeon, another engaged in some pleasing employment.

"I then put a question to him myself, accompanying it with a double portion of tobacco, for which I got a double portion of noise. I asked about my curiosities which I had left at Norway House (for want of room in our boats), to be brought on by the canoes which had taken up Sir John Richardson on their return. The medicine man told me that he saw the party with my baggage encamped on a sandy point, which we ourselves had passed two days before.

"However singular the coincidence may appear, it is a fact that, on the next day we had a fair wind, for which the medicine man, of course, took all the credit; and it is no less true, that the canoes with my baggage were on the sandy point on the day stated—for I inquired particularly of them when they came up to us."

The Major, who, with many other intelligent persons, is a firm believer in their medicine, told me that a Canadian once had the temerity to peep under the covering which enclosed the Jonglerie, but that he got such a fright that he never fairly recovered from it, nor could he ever be prevailed upon to tell what it was that had so appalled him.

About the same time that Kane was passing the Behring River, the Rev. G. J. Mountain, Bishop of Montreal, was paying a pastoral visit to the Anglican Church Missionary Society's Northwest American Mission. In his third letter home, the Bishop described the jugglers and conjurors of the Red River Indians. He had frequently seen the Shaking Tent, sometimes complete and in full operation, at other times in skeleton form abandoned after use. The Tents he saw were very tall, but only large enough to admit one man either lying down or bent double. He noted that the feet and hands of the sorcerer were first tied up with knotted cords, after which he was put inside the Tent.

"While he is lying in the Tent, it becomes violently agitated, the top swinging rapidly backward and forward in the view of the spectators on the outside, who also hear a variety of strange sounds and voices unlike the voice of man, the responses rendered within to the conjuror by his aerial visitors; after receiving which he supplies news respect-

ing persons and affairs at a great distance. During the process going on in the conjuring lodge, without looking boldly up, he catches glimpses, in the same plane with the topmost hoop of the lodge, of a number of objects like little stars."

According to the Indians, these sparks are the spirits summoned by the medicine man, which come and perch on the top hoop inside the wigwam, or sometimes sit on the floor beside him, who are reported to look like "human beings about four inches tall, but have long ears and squeaking voices like bats."

Bishop Mountain's Protestant clergy were as much divided as the Jesuit Fathers had been, on the question whether such phenomena were the work of the Devil or not. The Bishop preferred to think that they were delusions fostered by the Devil.

Both Bishop Mountain and Father LeJeune remark on the reluctance of their Indian Christian converts to repudiate wholly the genuineness of their former pagan magical practices. "They do not always," says the Bishop, "shake off every remnant of the old habitual awe attached to their mysteries, and of the strong imaginative fascinations which have acted upon their excited mind. They sometimes appear to shrink instinctively from the mention of the subject."

The German anthropologist, J. G. Kohl, who spent several years in the middle of the last century exploring the north and west shores of Lake Superior, has left us in his *Khichi-Gami, or Wanderings Around Lake Superior* (1860) a remarkable statement of the medicine man's own point of view about his conjuring powers. Kohl heard the story from another white trapper who had lived for years among the Indians and had married an Indian wife.

"Thirty years ago," said this white man, "I was present at the incantation and performance of a *jossakid* (local name for a medicine man) in one of these lodges. I saw the man creep into the hut, which was about ten feet high, after swallowing a mysterious potion made from a root. He immediately began singing and beating the drum in his basket work 'chimney.' The entire case began gradually trembling and shaking, and oscillating slowly amid great noise. The more the necromancer sang and drummed, the more violent the oscillations of the long case became. It bent backwards and forwards, up and down, like the mast of a vessel caught in a storm and tossed on the waves. I could not understand

how these movements could be produced by a man inside, as we could not have caused them from the exterior.

"The drum ceased, and the *jossakid* yelled that the spirits were coming after him. We then heard through the noise and crackling and oscillations of the hut two voices speaking inside, one above, the other below. The lower one asked questions, which the upper one answered. Both voices seemed entirely different, and I believed I could explain them by very clever ventriloquism. Some spiritualists among us, however, explained it through modern spiritualism, and asserted that the Indian *jossakids* had speaking media, in addition to those known to us, which tapped, wrote and drew."

There is a sequel to this story, for 30 years later this trapper came across a very old Indian, lying on his death bed, whom he recognized to be the very *jossakid* who had given the strange performance described above. Since that date, this Indian had become a Christian, and, of course, had renounced his former pagan practices. Kohl's narrator sat down beside the dying Indian, and began to talk to him.

"Uncle," he said to him, "dost thou remember prophesying to us in thy lodge thirty years ago, and astonishing us, not only by thy discourse, but also by the movements of thy prophet-lodge? I was curious to know how it was done, and thou saidst thou hadst performed it by supernatural power, 'through the spirits.' Now thou art old, and hast become a Christian; thou art sick and canst not live much longer. Now is the time to confess all truthfully. Tell me, then, how and through what means thou didst deceive us?"

"I know it, my uncle," the sick Indian replied. "I have become a Christian, I am old, I am sick, I cannot live much longer, and I can do no other than speak the truth. Believe me, I did not deceive you at that time. I did not move the lodge. It was shaken by the power of the spirits. I only repeated to you what the spirits said to me. I heard their voices. The top of the lodge was full of them, and before me the sky and wide lands lay expanded. I could see a great distance about me, and believed I could recognize the most distant objects."

"The dying old *jossakid*," concluded the trapper, "said this with such an expression of simple truth and firm conviction that it seemed to me, at least, that he did not consider himself a deceiver, and believed in the efficacy of his magic arts and in the reality of his visions."

Other deathbed confessions have been recorded. In 1840 Wan-Chus-Co, who had been a medicine man in his youth, but was converted to Christianity ten years before his death, died in Mackinac. Asked to explain his former conjuring feats, he told Henry R. Schoolcraft that as soon as he entered the tent, he struck a drum and began his incantations. Soon afterwards, he felt the presence of his personal manitous, or spirits, inside the tent, although he could not see them in the darkness. The shaking of the tent was caused by currents of air, gyrating inside the framework like a whirlwind.

In reply to another questioner, Wan-Chus-Co solemnly declared: "I possessed a power which I cannot explain or describe to you. I never attempted to move the tent. I held communication with supernatural beings, or spirits, which acted on my mind, or soul, and revealed to me such knowledge as I have described to you."

About the same period a famous Indian witch, Blue-Robed-Cloud-Woman, gave Schoolcraft a "confession" soon after she had joined the Methodist Episcopal Church. She, too, alleged that the tent shook violently by supernatural means, i.e., compressed currents of air moving in the upper part of the tent. The noise of this motion she took as a proof of the presence of the spirits. She acknowledged, in the light of her conversion to Christianity, that these spirits must have been "evil."

This conviction that the tent is shaken by winds is deeply implanted in the medicine man's thinking. It goes back to the time when he first acquired the ability to conjure. According to Professor Irving Hollowell of Pennsylvania University (in his *The Role of Conjuring in Saulteaux Society*), the neophyte receives this ability as a "dream blessing" during his puberty fast. In former times all Indians experienced dreams during these fasts, but in some cases—an estimated ten per cent—the dreams took the form of visits from a "Master" out of the West, who instructed the novice how to build a tent, and when to conjure in it.

The details of this advice vary. The neophyte is also shown the correct posture he must take inside the tent, kneeling like a paddler in a canoe. Finally, he dreams that the tent begins to shake, because of the presence of winds. The whole dream must be repeated four times before the neophyte's training is complete.

From time to time white men have claimed to have been initiated into the medicine man's secrets. In 1862 a young

Hudson's Bay Company fur trader, named W. Cornwallis King, had this experience on the eastern shore of Lake Winnipeg. According to the story King narrated many years later to Mary Weekes, he was on a trading trip, and happened to visit an encampment at Blood Vein River, where there was a sort of convention of leading medicine men of the district. He found erected there a huge medicine tent a hundred feet in circumference, surrounded by watching Indians, and within this a smaller tent containing four men and one woman, conjuring.

After seeing the tent shaken, and hearing the air filled with the cries of animals and birds, King persuaded one of the magicians, by means of a large present, to admit him inside the outer tent. This magician somehow gained the ear of one of the conjurors in the inner tent. Suddenly a bag was thrown over his head, he was unceremoniously dragged inside the tent, and then uncovered. A woman slashed his arm and sucked blood from the gashes. Then she ordered King to do the same to her. By this ceremony he was admitted to the craft and became a recognized medicine man.

Unfortunately, either the Indians did not initiate King fully into their secrets, or, if they did, he dared not reveal them to others. Beyond describing the various "medicines" used by the conjurors, and testifying that he had seen them work marvelous cures, he remained silent, saying nothing at all about the methods used to rock the tent.

In 1879, Sir Cecil Denny joined the Northwest Mounted Police, and was known as an efficient, level-headed and courageous officer. In the course of his duties, he camped on the Red Deer River near a large Blackfoot Indian Camp, and one moonlit night walked over to visit the lodge of a medicine man pitched to one side and some distance away from the main camp. He took with him his interpreter, Billy Gladstone, a half-breed.

"We entered the lodge, which had only a small fire burning in the center. The medicine man was sitting wrapped in his buffalo robe at the head of the teepee, smoking one of their long medicine pipes. He paid no attention to us whatever. I therefore sat down near him, lighting my own pipe and, placing a present of two plugs of tobacco near him, proceeded to smoke quietly, without a sign of recognition being made by the Indian.

"Everything was very still in the lodge, while outside in

the main camp drums could be heard beating in different parts, wherever dances were being held. We had sat this way for quite a time when I was startled by the sound of a bell ringing above me, over the top of the lodge. I could see nothing, and the Indian made no move. Presently the teepee itself began to rock, even lifting off the ground a foot or more behind me. When it is remembered that a large Indian tent consists of dozens of long poles crossed at the top, wide apart at the bottom, and covered with buffalo hides, it will seem that it is nearly impossible to lift one side—for no wind can blow them over.

"The rocking motion ceased after a while, and I went outside the lodge to see if anyone had been playing tricks; but not a human being was in sight near us, the moon was clear, and you could see a long distance. On returning and resuming my seat after a short interval the tent began again to rock, and so violently that it would sometimes lift several feet on one side, so that you could plainly see outside. My interpreter was thoroughly frightened by this time, and I was not much better, but the Indian never stirred. However, we had seen enough, and left, returning to our camp thoroughly mystified."

On another occasion Denny witnessed a medicine man dance barefoot for five minutes inside a ten-gallon copper kettle which had previously been placed empty on a blazing fire and made red hot. The heat from the kettle was so intense that Denny could not bear to sit near it; yet the Indian's bare feet showed no sign of a burn after his dance.

He also saw a medicine man tightly bound hand and foot with rawhide ropes and then thrust naked inside a tent whose floor was covered with sharp pointed stakes set upright in the ground. The medicine man emerged free of the ropes and without mark or scratch; the sharp pointed stakes were also seemingly untouched.

By the beginning of this century, the shaking tent had become so great a rarity that it had passed almost into the domain of legend. No one could hope to see it in operation in the civilized parts of Canada, east or west.

However, it still survives in the wilder parts of the west and northwest territories. In July, 1929, it was witnessed and recorded in the Mackenzie River Basin. A young official of the Hudson's Bay Company had the good luck to encounter a famous medicine man among those Indians who had come together to receive the payment due to them un-

der a past treaty with the Company. Black persuaded this Indian, whose name was August, to show his tricks before the gathering which included several white men.

"Before dusk," he claimed "two Indian lads went to the bush to get the necessary willow poles, which were driven fast into the ground and fastened with two willow hoops, one in the center, the other tapering the poles at the top. The poles were tested by nearly all present, and were found immovable. A can of shot was tied to the top of the poles, and the birch bark was then fastened on the outside to complete the construction.

"As it darkened and the moon came up, the Indians squatted in a circle around the wigwam at a distance of four or six feet from it. A small opening was made in the west for the Indian to crawl in, and closed immediately on his entrance. The wigwam commenced to shake as soon as the Indian disappeared, and the can of shot began to rattle. The Indians were awe-stricken while the medicine man commenced an eerie type of song. This lasted nearly half an hour; and he then commenced to talk, telling them in their native tongue that he had got in touch with the spirits and expected them at any time, although they were having a little difficulty to reach him. All the time the wigwam continued to shake.

"A small disturbance took place, and a strange voice was heard. The medicine man's voice could be heard at the base of the wigwam, while the strange voice came from the top. The voices were decidedly different. After having conversed with the strange voice for some time, August told the silent watchers that he could answer any of their questions, but they had first to place a plug of chewing tobacco under the tepee. He was soon showered with questions, 'How many fish will I gather in the morning?' and 'What luck will I have in trapping this year?'

"When the native questions became fewer, August said he would be glad to answer any question asked by the white onlookers. At the suggestion of the others, I asked: 'May we hold the wigwam while it is shaking?' A rapid talk by August commenced in the wigwam, and I could feel an unpleasantness among the Indians about me. Although I do not understand their language, I sensed something was wrong, and I was told that August had said that if the white people interfered with the motion of the wigwam, he would make such a big wind it would blow people and houses into

the lake. One Indian, in a fit of excitement, called upon his people to 'Clean it up' on the whites. I, having asked the question, immediately told the Indians that we did not wish to interfere if trouble might result. This passed over, and although the wigwam had not once stopped shaking, the medicine man decided to show more of his powers. He said he was going to call the spirit of a bear into the wigwam and show how he could kill it with his hands.

"When the bear spirit arrived in the wigwam, great excitement arose among the Indian onlookers. The fight began, and this was where I received my great surprise. The Indians seated around yelled to August, *An-huck!* ('Get stronger!'). The top of the wigwam bent until it nearly touched the ground during the fight.

"An Indian turned to me saying, 'Now do you believe it?' Naturally, I answered, 'Yes,' there being about 600 believers there! Eventually, the bear spirit was killed, and August repeated the feat with the spirit of a lynx, which brought yells of excitement from the gathering.

"Daylight was breaking when August emerged from the wigwam with beads of perspiration covering his face. The bark was immediately removed from the wigwam, and we examined the poles and were surprised to find them as solid as they had been at first. I have been informed, although I have not witnessed it, that August can make a teepee shake by merely throwing his hat into it."

Since 1929, two or three more firsthand accounts of the tent have been published—by Professor Hollowell of a ceremony at Berens River, Lake Winnipeg in 1930; by Allan Nelson of one at Little Grand Rapids, Manitoba, in 1936; by Sister B. Coleman of one at Cass Lake, Minnesota, in 1937; and by Regina Flannery of one among the Montagnais of James Bay in 1939. Probably, therefore, there are still to be found a few medicine men, skilled in the old traditions, who can produce the phenomena witnessed and minutely described by over a score of white men since the days of Champlain.

Surveying this centuries old record, we notice the singular consistency that runs through all the eyewitness stories. Certain phenomena are manifested, not always the same, but in variants, and not always together, but more or less complete.

They are: The shaking of the tent. A range of movement from mere quivering to rocking to and fro "until the tent-

top almost touches the ground." As a rule, the medicine man must be inside the tent to cause this shaking, but in some accounts he is seen lying on the ground with his limbs extended and even protruding under a flap of the tent.

In many cases he causes the phenomena only after having been securely tied hand and foot by his associates; but usually employs a rattle and drum as accompaniments to lengthy chanting and howling, in preparation for going into a trance. During the first stages of this trance condition, different voices, both human and bestial, can be distinguished. These voices seem to come from different parts of the tent, high and low.

In some accounts, fiery discharges are noticed above the open top of the tent. They are a prelude to the divinatory culmination of the trance period. The Indians believe that they are the spirits.

The medicine man, announcing either that the "spirits" have arrived, or that he is going off (or sending someone off) to consult them, afterwards declares himself ready to answer questions from his audience. Sometimes he uses an imaginary spirit-interpreter for this purpose. Usually these are of a trivial, but practical, character, relating to weather, hunting or fishing conditions, health and sickness of friends and relatives, and outcome of journeys.

The tent can be used for healing the sick, as well as for divining the future.

White men observers explain the phenomena on the following lines: the shaking of the tent is done by the medicine man himself through some unexplained method of trickery. But no one has ever been able to demonstrate this method.

The fiery sparks are either a figment of the imagination, or are produced by the medicine man from a pipe concealed on his person when he enters the tent. Some of the descriptions suggest that the sparks might be a kind of electrical discharge, similar to St. Elmo's Fire.

The voices heard during the incantation are produced by the medicine man by means of ventriloquism. There is a difficulty here, inasmuch as modern writers on the technique always insist on the distinction between "near" and "distant" ventriloquism; the former requiring the use of puppets; the latter depending on the ventriloquist's skill in indicating by suitable gestures the exact spot from which the voice is supposed to come. There is no such thing as "throwing the voice" to a distance from the speaker. To quote one modern

ventriloquist, "The voice is not thrown. The illusion of distance is produced by the diffusion of the voice which, in turn, is created by pressure on the vocal chords." In producing the kind of voice which seems to come from above, "You must direct the attention of your audience upwards by looking or pointing towards the ceiling. Always remember that your acting ability is very important in producing the effect which you desire. If you turn away from your audience when listening to the voice of your unseen companion, it destroys a large part of the effectiveness of the act."

The medicine man being inside the tent, is unable to act in such a way as to make his audience think they hear his voice thrown from the upper part of the tent. The only way to explain this phenomenon would be to suppose (as is indeed generally the case) that, among the audience outside the tent, the medicine man has a confederate who contrives to direct the attention of the audience to the tent-top, and so supply the "acting" which the sorcerer himself cannot provide.

The prognostications during the ceremony are acknowledged by the observers to have turned out correct. Others merely say the results are in accordance with chance.

The physical shaking of the tent must be set down either to fraud or to hallucination, or admitted to be a genuine "miracle." If it is fraudulent it is a pity no one has exposed the precise method of doing the trick. If it is due to hallucination, we must suppose that the medicine man, by some power of suggestion, hypnotizes his audience into thinking that they see the tent shake and dance.

But collective hallucination of this sort is not easy to accept. Sir William Crookes has pointed out that "The supposition that there is a sort of mania or delirium that suddenly attacks a whole roomful of intelligent persons who are quite sane elsewhere, and who all concur, to the minutest particulars, in the detail of the occurrences of which they suppose themselves to be witnesses, seems to my mind more incredible than even the facts which they attest."

More recently, the late Professor Hans Driesch of Leipzig, a former president of the British Society for Psychical Research, stated: "I admit that a single person, investigating so-called psychic phenomena, can fall a victim to hallucination, caused by auto-suggestion. But this possibility appears to me excluded in the case of observation by several persons."

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